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and Philosophy**

The Evolution of the Islamist Ideology

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Summary

Islamist terrorism has, in academic and lay discourse, been misunderstood in the register of 'extremism,' 'radicalism' and 'fundamentalism.' The concepts of 'terrorism' and 'ideology' have frequently been misused as pejoratives to prevent understanding of Islamist terrorism. This does not mean that they are beyond repair and we attempt to re-establish the terms as useful critical concepts for understanding the Islamist movement. This study takes the Islamist ideology seriously; it is comprehensive, complex and internally coherent. We claim that Islamist movements and the terrorism they engage in can be usefully understood by examining the historical evolution of the ideology. In particular we examine the dynamic interplay between the theory and practice of Islamist movements. Using the tools of social and political philosophy the study critically examines the historical and intellectual evolution of the Islamist ideology and movement from the inception of the Society of Muslim Brothers in 1920s Egypt, the radical philosophy of Sayyid Qutb in the 1950s and 60s through to al-Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks.

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Glossary of Arabic and Islamic Terms

Al-Hakimiyya	Absolute sovereignty of Allah
Bay'ah	Oath of allegiance
Bida'	Innovations or additions
Dar al-Islam	Muslim land, literally land of peace
Da'wa	Call to Islam
Emir	Leader of a group
Fard Ayn	Duty that falls on the individual
Fard Kifayah	Collective duty
Fatwa	Religious/legal ruling
Fellahin	Rural peasants
Fitna	Division. Also trial or temptation.
Franji	Foreign or alien
Gama'a al-Islamiyyah	The Islamic Group
Hadith	The sayings of the Prophet
Haraam	Forbidden
Hijra	Migration
Ijtihad	Independent interpretation of religious texts
Infidels	Non-believers
Jahiliyya	Ignorance of Islam
Jihad	To struggle or to strive
Kafir/kufr	Unbeliever/apostate. Someone who has knowingly rejected Islam
Khedive	Lord or Ruler
Mujahedeen	Muslim 'freedom-fighter'
Mujtahid	Learned scholars of <i>shar'ia</i>
Rashidun	First four rightly-guided caliphs after the death of the Prophet
Salaf	Predecessor, early generation of Muslims
Salaf	Righteous ancestors
Shahada	Islamic declaration of faith and the unity of Allah
Shar'ia	Islamic law
Sunna	Collected traditions of Prophet's practice and habits
Takfir	Declaration of unbelief against a fellow Muslim
Tawhid	Unity of Allah - literally 'making one'
Ulema	Religious leaders
Wafd	Delegation - The Egyptian Wafd party
Waqf	Islamic endowment
Zakat	Charity

1 Accounting For Terrorism

1.1 Introduction

There are two main barriers to understanding Islamist terrorism. The first, widespread in the mainstream media, lay and academic discourse, is the caricature of the Islamist terrorist as the fanatic. According to this position terrorists are variously fundamentalists, extremists, radicals or militants—they may believe something very strongly—but exactly what they believe either does not make sense or cannot be understood; in other words the terrorist is irrational. The second barrier is the related claim that Islamist terrorism is, if using secular categories, morally reprehensible, or from a theological perspective, evil. From this perspective terrorists not only cannot be understood but also should not be understood. This study aims to go beyond these two barriers. We shall argue that understanding Islamist terrorism is an important philosophical pursuit. There are two central theses that shall guide our investigation: one, the Islamist ideology informs the actions of the Islamist movement, and thus understanding the ideology is crucial to understanding Islamist terrorism. Two, the Islamist ideology can only be comprehensively understood through a critical examination of its historical evolution. Underlying both these theses is the claim that all ideas can, and should, be taken seriously without resorting to moral judgements or accusations of irrationality.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will survey the literature and critically examine the various approaches that have been used to examine terrorism in general or Islamist terrorism in particular. Through the critique of these methodologies we will propose an alternative methodology that seeks to understand Islamist terrorism through a critical examination of the historical evolution of the Islamist ideology. The second section discusses the history of the concept 'ideology' and argues that if a definition and theory of ideology is correctly formulated then it can be utilized as a critically productive mode of understanding action. The final section attempts to carve out a definition of terrorism that, without attempting to be definitive, is at least fit for the purposes of this study.

The final three chapters will fulfil, within the limits of the study, the second of our two main theses—a critical historical study of the evolution of the Islamist ideology. The second chapter will examine the early modern period of the creation, rise and fall of the Egyptian Society of Muslim Brothers led by Hasan al-Banna. The third chapter will study the seminal writings of Sayyid Qutb in the 1950s and 60s that had a powerful influence on the evolution of the Islamist ideology. The final chapter will examine the late modern period from the Afghanistan *jihād* in the 1980s, the formation and development of al-Qaeda, to the attacks of September 11th, 2001.

1.2 Methodology

How should we best account for Islamist terrorism? A preliminary step would be to narrow our terms of reference. At this stage it will suffice to utilise an intuitive definition: ‘Islamist’ shall be used to designate an act (terrorism) committed in the name of Islam i.e. the actors involved self-identify the meaning and purpose of their behaviour within the terms of ‘Islam.’¹ We shall discuss the problem of defining and conceptualising ‘terrorism’ later on in this chapter, and the notion of ‘Islamist’ will be refined at a later stage. For now it will suffice to note that the archetypal acts of Islamist terrorism were the attacks on September 11th, 2001 in New York, Arlington and Pennsylvania (henceforth 9/11). Although this study will examine this particular attack it will be primarily concerned with the historical, social and ideological development of the Islamist movement and terrorism that stretches back decades before 9/11.² Obviously the phenomenon of Islamist terrorism did not end on 9/11 but every historical study requires its temporal limitations and 9/11 will serve as a logical cut-off point for this one.

Having offered a preliminary definition of terms and narrowed down our subject we can now return to our original question ‘how should we best *account* for Islamist terrorism.’ The italicised ‘account’ is deliberately ambiguous. It is intended to highlight the methodological difference between the rival modes of ‘explaining’ or ‘understanding’ social phenomena. It is beyond the scope of this work to offer a comprehensive discussion of the various

¹ ‘Islamist’ is ordinarily used to refer to politicised Islam. As we shall see whilst this is broadly correct it is not entirely accurate.

² As will be made clear not all strains of Islamist terrorism led to 9/11 and there are some more-or-less discrete modes of Islamist terrorism, between which there have been some violent disagreements. The particular collection of strains we are interested in, however, are the ones that are *ideologically* connected to 9/11.

philosophies of social science but it will be necessary to justify our chosen methodology for accounting for Islamist terrorism over other competing methodologies.

We shall examine several methodologies that have been used to theorise terrorism and highlight their deficiencies. What they have in common is a conspicuous lack of any serious attempt to understand, or take seriously, the Islamist ideology as a conceptual framework for understanding the Islamist movement. Some naturalist models ignore the ideology altogether or explain it away as a rationalisation of more fundamental psychological or sociological drives. Neoconservatives dismiss the ideology as ‘fanatical’ or ‘evil’ and therefore beyond rational understanding. Some political theorists directly map their own ideology onto that of the Islamists and so fail to take the Islamist ideology seriously. Rational-choice theorists model the ideology as a set of preferences without attempting to explain why those preferences exist. Narrative-driven historical accounts will take some account of the Islamist ideology but have often sidelined its importance in understanding the development of the movements. The history of the Islamist movement has been told in many different ways but the failure to take ideology seriously has left an explanatory void at the heart of these narratives.

We will propose a methodology that has at its centre the claim that ideas matter deeply and that to understand the Islamist movement and Islamist terrorism we must understand the Islamist ideology. We will claim that the ideology has deep historical and intellectual roots, is cogent, comprehensive and comprehensible. Furthermore our conceptual framework will demonstrate that the ideology is dynamic; it evolves with the movement and the historical path and actions of the movement are intimately linked with the ideology. This interdependency will allow us to understand the Islamist movement, ideology and terrorism in new and important ways.

We are not seeking to entirely discredit rival methods of accounting for terrorism—all of which possess some merit—nor claiming that our chosen methodology is without defect. The phenomenon and history of Islamist terrorism is far too large and complex to be completely understood or explained from a single perspective or theoretical model. Our aim is to explore a fruitful methodology for accounting for Islamist terrorism that has been broadly neglected in the extant literature on the subject.

In the first part of this chapter we shall briefly examine the difference between the two major modes of accounting before broadly rejecting 'explanation' in favour of 'understanding.' We will then turn to the various disciplines that have been used to account for terrorism and examine problems associated with each approach. We shall then suggest a hybrid methodology—combining elements of philosophy, social science and history—that seeks to describe and account for the evolution of the ideology that both animates and gives meaning to Islamist terrorism. Paul Wilkinson's thesis shall provide guidance: 'understanding terrorism is an historical and philosophical, as well as scientific task.'³

1.2.1 Explanation versus Understanding

The distinction between explanation and understanding rests on one's epistemological account of the social sciences.⁴ Those who believe that the behaviour and actions of humans and societies can, and should, be studied objectively, claim that the methodology of natural sciences should be applied to the social sciences. This naturalistic or positivist view supposes that the behaviour of man is of no essential qualitative difference to the behaviour of the physical world. According to this view the behaviour of humans and gas molecules—to use one example—can fundamentally be explained and eventually predicted in the same way. Laws can be formulated that explain and predict the behaviour of both, and underlying causes may also be discovered that explain the laws. Although proponents of this view might accept that the behaviour of the interaction of large groups of humans is so complex, with effectively an unlimited number of uncontrollable and unquantifiable variables, that in practice much of social human behaviour is beyond the scope of scientific knowledge. Despite this, it is argued that the naturalistic theory still stands: the quantity and complexity of human social behaviour does not mean that there is a qualitative difference between men and molecules.

There are many problems with the naturalistic approach to human sciences, not the least of which is the fact that the methodology, epistemology and ontology of the natural sciences are hardly beyond philosophical controversy. Leaving this aside there are more fundamental problems with the explanatory framework; to put it starkly, molecules cannot answer back—

³ Paul Wilkinson *Terror and the Liberal State* p.96

⁴ Only the barest of schematic discussions, of what is a complex topic, will be necessary to draw out the conclusions required for our purposes.

humans can. The objects of natural science may be indifferent to the scientist's gaze, but humans certainly are not. There is the further level of reflexive complexity that we shall discuss in some more detail later, that scientists, despite their attempts at attaining objectivity through the scientific method, remain human too, which when faced with the subject of human behaviour, will almost inevitably affect their research. When studying molecules, the object remains necessarily indifferent, and in theory so too does the scientist; when studying humans both the subject and scientist will struggle to remain objectively detached. Lyotard encapsulates this problem in *The Postmodern Condition*:

It is generally accepted that nature is an indifferent, not deceptive, opponent, and it is upon this basis that the distinction is made between the natural and the human sciences. In pragmatic terms this means that in the natural sciences "nature" is the referent – mute, but as predictable as a die thrown a great number of times – about which scientists exchange denotative utterances constituting moves they play against one another. In the human sciences, on the other hand, the referent (man) is a participant in the game, one that speaks and develops a strategy (a mixed strategy, perhaps) to counter that of the scientist: here, the kind of chance with which the scientist is confronted is not an object based or indifferent, but behavioural or strategic – in other words, antagonistic.⁵

A deeper problem than that of the interested subject for the naturalist methodology is the idea that humans usually 'mean' something by their actions, in a way that molecules cannot mean something by their behaviour. If this is true then only observing, theorising and predicting the external behaviour of humans will leave out what the behaviour means. The idea of 'meaning' is a philosophically complex one—for instance does meaning lie in the intentions of the actor i.e. what is meant, or the meaning that is 'understood' by others?

For our purposes only a brief exposition of the topic is necessary. The hermeneutic tradition's central claim—in contrast to the naturalist—is that 'the social world must be *understood* from within, rather than *explained* from without.'⁶ This understanding is to be sought in the shared meanings that actors give to, and interpret in the actions of others. The idea that shared social meaning is both unique to human behaviour and is essential to interpreting and understanding

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* p.57

⁶ Martin Hollis *The Philosophy of Social Science* pp.16-17 Emphasis added.

human action means that the tools of the natural science will be ultimately inadequate for the human or social sciences.⁷

A classic distinction between explanation (*erklären*) and understanding (*verstehen*) was made by Max Weber in the first volume of *Economy and Society*. ‘Sociology’ writes Weber ‘is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action...’⁸ By ‘action’ Weber refers to behaviour to which the actor attaches a ‘subjective meaning.’ ‘Social action’ is that which ‘takes account of the behaviour of others’ i.e. the subjective meaning is located within a shared or intersubjective universe of meaning.⁹ Meaningful behaviour—social action—should be analysed through interpretive understanding in contrast to the non-meaningful behaviour of the physical world that can be theorised using explanation. The implicit and irreducible connections between action, meaning and society are recognised by Peter Winch: ‘all meaningful behaviour must be social, since it can be meaningful only if governed by rules, and rules presuppose a social setting.’¹⁰ A central thesis in this work is that in order to account for the phenomenon under study, Islamist terrorism, the behaviour of the actors must be meaningfully interpreted and understood within its social context. The correlate of this thesis is the claim that Islamist terrorism *must* be meaningful as it is always a social action.¹¹

“Understanding,” Winch goes on to state, ‘is grasping the *point* or *meaning* of what is being done or said. This is a notion far removed from the world of statistics and causal laws: it is closer to the realm of discourse and to the internal relations that link the parts of a realm of discourse.’¹² If Islamist terrorism can be conceptualised as the type of social action under study then we shall claim that the Islamist ideology is the set of rules or discourse that governs its practice and lends it its meaning. Understanding the Islamist ideology and its internal relations will therefore be essential for grasping the meaning of Islamist terrorism. When framed in this way it should be clear that we are not asking ‘what causes Islamist terrorism?’ or ‘why does Islamist terrorism happen?’ as these types of questions operate within the explanatory mode of a naturalist science. These questions misconstrue, or avoid,

⁷ We will ignore the possibility that some behaviour in the animal kingdom possesses a shared meaning. Even if this was true our understanding will be necessarily limited by our ability to interpret this meaning.

⁸ Max Weber *Economy and Society* p.4

⁹ Max Weber *Economy and Society* p.4

¹⁰ Peter Winch *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* p.116

¹¹ As we shall see these two claims are certainly not universally accepted.

¹² Peter Winch *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* p.115

the essential meaningfulness of social action. Instead our central questions are ‘what is the meaning of Islamist terrorism?’ and ‘how can Islamist terrorism be best understood?’ Our claim, therefore, is not that the Islamist ideology causes terrorism, but that only an interpretative understanding of the ideology will allow us to reconstruct the meaning of the terrorism and the behaviour of the wider Islamist movement.

The fourth element—along with action, meaning and society—that Winch introduces into the hermeneutic nexus is the fruitful Wittgensteinian concept of ‘rules’ and the related ideas of ‘forms of life’ and ‘language games.’ We shall find opportunity to use Wittgenstein further on in our exploration of the ideas of ‘terrorism’ and ‘ideology’ so we shall restrain ourselves to some brief remarks at this point. The idea that social action is ruled-governed, and that the rules are socially-constructed, will be important for our interpretative understanding of the Islamist ideology. It will be useful to conceptualise the ideology as a type of dynamic discourse that generates rules of behaviour for its adherents. This process however, as we shall argue, is not one-way, the actors both act according to the rules of the ideology, but they simultaneously construct and shape the ideology and its rules.¹³

1.2.2 Explaining Terrorism: Psychological Account of Terrorism

To illustrate the difference between the ‘explanation’ and ‘understanding’ methodologies we shall examine some examples of each. The first approach to explaining terrorism is what can be broadly called the psychological account. This usually takes either the strong form of identifying certain psychological traits that cause people to seek to engage in terrorism, or a weaker version that identifies a shared psychological profile of the subject without claiming that it is this that specifically and sufficiently causes the terrorist behaviour. The strong claim would be difficult to defend as it seems clear that even if a study identifies the psychological traits (a, b and c) as being common amongst terrorists it would be possible to identify non-terrorists who share those traits and find terrorists who do not possess all or any of them. The weaker claim by contrast only identifies psychological dispensations that indicate a person is more likely to engage in terrorism, rather than necessary or sufficient conditions and would therefore be easier to defend but would also suffer from being a far weaker predictor of terrorist behaviour.

¹³ The complex interplay between actors and ideology will form a central concern of this study.

Despite these problems there are commentators who are committed to the psychological account of terrorism albeit using more sophisticated versions of the basic types above. Jerold Post, for example argues that people join terrorist groups because they are ‘driven by psychological forces.’¹⁴ In other words actors do not sign up because they believe in the group’s cause or its ideology but they join the group to facilitate, rationalise and justify the ‘acts of violence ... that they are psychologically compelled to commit.’¹⁵ Post concludes that ‘the cause is not the cause ... individuals become terrorists in order to join terrorist groups and commit acts of violence.’¹⁶ The alleged inversion of means and ends, whereby the professed ends are used to justify the means, is present to some extent in a range of theories about terrorism. According to these theorists the means are actually the ends, and the professed ends are merely justifications or rationalizations for engaging in the violent means.¹⁷ The end point of this inversion occurs when the means and ends become indistinguishable and terrorist violence is committed for its own sake. As a general rule the more violent or arbitrary the terrorism appears to be, and the less clear or feasible the professed end, then the more likely it is that this ‘fanatic’ model of terrorism prevails. Walter Laqueur’s writings on fanaticism provide a striking example of this mode of reasoning:

The murkier the political purpose of terrorism, the greater its appeal to mentally unbalanced persons. The motives of people fighting a cruel tyranny are quite different from those of rebels against a democratically elected regime. Rather than idealism, a social conscience, or ardent patriotism, one finds among the latter free-floating aggression, boredom, and mental confusion.¹⁸

Laqueur is writing about Islamist terrorism in this instance and it is clear to see how Islamists have become the archetypal ‘fanatical’ actors in both the popular imagination and with several commentators. They meet Laqueur’s criteria of committing apparently disproportionate and arbitrary violence—with 9/11 serving as the paradigmatic case—and for their sometimes professed, and sometimes imagined end, being both difficult to clearly discern and impossible to achieve. The ends of Islamists that are often cited range from the

¹⁴ Jerold M. Post “Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorist behavior as a product of psychological forces” p.35

¹⁵ Jerold M. Post “Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorist behavior as a product of psychological forces” p.35
Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Jerold M. Post “Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorist behavior as a product of psychological forces” p.35
Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ For example a person joining a national liberation movement does so in order to engage in the means of violence rather than to achieve the ends of liberation.

¹⁸ Walter Laqueur *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* p.40

destruction of America, Israel and the West to the creation of a global caliphate. Although when presented so starkly it seems that the 'fanatic' model of terrorism should be dismissed as a hackneyed caricature of the crazed terrorist, the problem of the relationship between means and ends is a serious one and so we shall find opportunity to discuss it in more nuanced terms and in greater detail later. For now we shall raise some further objections to the psychological explanation of terrorism.

1.2.3 Problems with the Psychological Account

We have already noted that psychological accounts of terrorism will either be too strong and therefore overly deterministic, or too weak and thus are poor predictors of terrorism and lack explanatory power. They are also problematic within their own terms; an overview of empirical studies of terrorism found they are 'nearly unanimous in [the] conclusion that mental illness and abnormality are typically not critical factors in explaining terrorist behaviour.'¹⁹ A related explanatory approach to the psychological account is one that identifies socio-economic predictors of terrorist behaviour. Although socio-economic data might be easier to collect and analyse than psychological traits it suffers from the same flaws inherent in the psychological account. In an empirical study of several hundred subjects connected with al-Qaeda, Marc Sageman found that despite the stereotypes of poor, religious and uneducated men driven to join terrorist organizations:

Most of the terrorists ... do not come from the poorest countries in the world ... three-fourths come from upper and middle class families. ... They grew up in caring intact families, mildly religious and concerned about their communities. ... Over 60 percent have some college education. Most are in the technical fields, such as engineering, architecture, computers, medicine, and business. ... Far from being immature teenagers, the men ... joined the terrorist organization at the age of twenty-six years, on average.²⁰

Although Sageman discovers some socio-economic correlations between the actor's background and terrorist activity they are neither the sort of correlations that we might have naively expected nor do they help us understand either why these particular people, and not others with similar backgrounds, engaged in terrorist activities.

¹⁹ Randy Borum "Psychology of Terrorism"

²⁰ Marc Sageman "The Normality of Global Jihadi Terrorism"

The major flaw with both these explanatory approaches, however, is that they fail to understand terrorism. They bypass meaning in their search for causal determinates of terrorist behaviour. Even if socio-economic or psychological correlations could be identified—which as we have demonstrated is unlikely—we would still have a myopic account of terrorism. Ultimately, unless we suppose that one ‘fanatical’ terrorist ideology is perfectly substitutable for another, and therefore the terrorist behaviour is literally without meaning, then the psychological and other similarly structured explanatory accounts cannot be accepted. They cannot, for instance, explain the particular features or shape of an ideology—as the ideology is arbitrarily disconnected from the violence—or account for the ideology’s historical development. There is a surfeit of meaning that the psychological and socio-economic models simply do not and cannot account for and thus entirely ignores.

1.2.4 Politicised Accounts of Terrorism

We have already examined the poverty of explanatory accounts that fail to attempt to understand the ideology behind terrorism; by contrast politicised accounts not only fail to understand ideology but implicitly, or sometimes explicitly reject the task altogether. We refer to ‘politicised’ accounts to describe theorists who interpret terrorism from the political perspective of the author. As we shall examine later the ideological disposition of the observer cannot be fully escaped and thus will inevitably distort their ability to describe another ideology. With the politicised accounts of terrorism however the author’s ideology infects their perspective on the subject so deeply that almost nothing useful can be discovered about the practice and ideology under examination.²¹ These accounts neither explain nor understand terrorism; they simply use terrorism to reinforce their own political philosophy. To illustrate this model and its flaws we shall examine two opposing political paradigms through which terrorism is explained; we shall label them ‘neoconservative’ and ‘left-wing’ accounts.

1.2.5 Neoconservative Account of Terrorism

For the purposes of this study we will use the term ‘neoconservative’ to refer to the political philosophy popularly associated with the George Bush Jnr. administration following the

²¹ It is, however, possible to learn something about the commentator’s ideology by studying the distortion.

attacks of 9/11.²² One broad feature of neoconservatism is a belief in an interventionist foreign policy that actively utilises American political, military and economic capital to export pro-Western, free-market, liberal democratic regimes abroad. From this perspective 9/11 was interpreted not only as an act of aggression against the United States but more fundamentally as an existential attack on the Western values of freedom, democracy, security and the rule of law. The binary worldview of enlightened Western values against those of the terrorists meant that the latter could be described in the register of 'fundamentalism' that appears as a purely reactive, retrograde and reactionary force.

The neoconservative account shares some features with the psychological model, for example terrorists are often thought to be fanatical, fundamentalist and irrational. However there is a key difference, the neoconservative uses these labels as a way of cutting off any further enquiry. This is based on three moral convictions: firstly, terrorism is always essentially wrong or evil; secondly, understanding terrorism is tantamount to justifying it; and therefore thirdly, to understand terrorism is to justify it and therefore to justify evil. A related argument amounts to the same the conclusion—terrorism is evil and evil cannot be understood. The political upshot of this reasoning that provided the political philosophy behind the 'war on terror' is the belief that terrorists must be uprooted from their strongholds and destroyed, as opposed to any attempt to understand their actions or enter into dialogue and political engagement.²³ This zero-sum reasoning can be simplified into the maxim: they will do anything to destroy us, and our way of life, so we must do everything to destroy them first.

There are two interlinking strands of argument that are used to support the neoconservative account of terrorism and it is this linkage that exposes a paradox inherent in the account. The first strand is akin to a pejorative version of the psychological account; it claims that terrorists are variously irrational, fanatical, or even insane. These pejoratives are often packed into the terminology of fundamentalism, extremism and radicalism—although often just the word 'terrorist' is used to indicate these subsidiary properties. The 'irrational' terrorist model is

²² Elements of the modern neoconservative political philosophy have been traced back to the ideas of Carl Schmitt. In particular his ideas of dictatorship and the executive licence afforded by the declaration of state of emergency have been linked by critics of neoconservatism as providing the illegitimate justification for the tactics employed in the 'war on terror.'

²³ This thesis shall not be directly concerned with the Western response to Islamist terrorism or the 'war on terror' except insofar as it has influenced the evolution of the Islamist ideology. As we shall be ending our account at 9/11, the point at which the Western counterterrorist efforts began in earnest, the historical significance of the 'war on terror' is minimal.

sometimes backed by a more nuanced argument than mere dogma. Jessica Stern, for example claims that:

Politically motivated terrorists do not appear to be “rational actors.” Political terrorists have rarely achieved their putative goals, and yet politically motivated terrorism persists. This suggests that the terrorists are motivated by something other than cost-benefit calculations about how to achieve the goals of their organization. Their individual motivations and the dynamics of their groups may lead to acts of violence that are inconsistent with their purported objectives. ... For ad hoc groups seeking revenge, acts of violence are likely to be expressive rather than instrumental. Religious extremists, similarly, may be actively aiming for chaos or, in some cases, for martyrdom. It is hard to deter a group that is seeking to bring on Armageddon.²⁴

Stern’s argument rests on the claim that whatever rhetoric terrorists employ to justify their actions, their ‘putative goals,’ this is belied by their actions. The *real* motivation for their violence is first identified as ‘revenge’ but finally located in the irrational, nihilist desire for ‘chaos, ... martyrdom ... [and ultimately] Armageddon.’ Some commentators embellish Stern’s claim by making a qualitative distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ terrorism. ‘Old’ terrorism such as the European left-wing groups of the 1970s exemplified by the Red Army Faction, or national-separatist terrorism including the Provisional IRA, are said to have discrete and explicit political objectives that, if achieved, would result in the end of terrorist activities. These groups acted more or less rationally by using terrorism as an appropriate tool to achieve their ends. The ‘new’ terrorism by contrast has no clearly demarcated or achievable political goals, and the violence that they inflict cannot obviously bring about the ill-defined utopian world they imagine. The ‘new’ terrorism is irrational, open-ended, unpredictable and unlimited—with no act of destruction too dire to contemplate. The only limit that these groups face is their ability to acquire and deploy means of mass destruction. The most prominent proponent of this view, Walter Laqueur, writes:

In its most extreme form, this new terrorism intends to liquidate all satanic forces, which may include the majority of a country or of mankind, as a precondition for the growth of another, better, and in any case different breed of human. In its maddest, most extreme form it may aim at the destruction of all life on earth, as the ultimate punishment for mankind’s crimes.²⁵

²⁴ Jessica Stern *The Ultimate Terrorists* pp.130-131

²⁵ Walter Laqueur *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* p.81

One feature that Laqueur and others identify in the 'new' terrorism is the role that religion plays in motivating the actors and providing rhetorical justification for its unbounded violence.²⁶ Religion, in the hands of the fundamentalists, becomes an irrational, dogmatic and immutable force that is closed off from reason. Commentators suggest that religious terrorists consider themselves as God's agents on earth whose irrevocable duty is to carry out His divine will. This provides them with 'an absolute certainty as to the justness of their cause, the legitimacy of their leader, the inability, to recognize other moral values and considerations, and the abdication of critical judgement.'²⁷ The prevalence of the religious suicide terrorist—sometimes expressed as a cult of martyrdom—is identified as the final seal on the fanatic argument. The willingness with which the religious terrorist destroys himself, it is claimed, at the same instance of destroying others, demonstrates the awful purposefulness with which they carry out their imagined duty and the absence of reason in their actions.

The second, less prevalent—particularly in academic circles—strand in the neoconservative account of terrorism is the ethical argument that conflates understanding and justification.²⁸ This mode of argumentation is often couched in theological terminology that categorises the terrorists as evil. Although differing from the 'fanatical' strand of the neoconservative account the upshot of the argument is similar. The 'fanatic' or 'irrational' strand claims that a certain type of terrorism cannot be understood; the ethical strand claims that they should not be understood. Furthermore, the depiction of the terrorist as a fanatic and therefore beyond reason in the first strand is mirrored in the second strand by the terrorist as a 'perfect nihilist' or 'moral monster' and therefore beyond moral reasoning.²⁹ A classic example of this mode of reasoning appears in a polemical essay by Benjamin Netanyahu:

The terrorist represents a new breed of man which takes humanity back to prehistoric times, to the times when morality was not yet born. Divested of any moral principle, he has no moral sense, no moral controls, and is therefore capable of committing any crime, like a killing machine, without shame or remorse. ... The root cause of terrorism lies not in grievances but in a disposition toward unbridled violence. This can be traced to a world view which asserts that certain ideological and religious goals justify, indeed demand the shedding of all moral inhibitions. In

²⁶ Walter Laqueur *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* p.92

²⁷ Walter Laqueur *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* pp.98-99

²⁸ Some theologically-oriented academics slip easily between the two strands of the neoconservative argument. See Jean Bethke Elstain *Just War Against Terror: Ethics and the Burden of American Power in a Violent World*

²⁹ Benjamin Netanyahu "Terrorists and Freedom Fighters" p.30

this context the observation that the root cause of terrorism is terrorists is more than a tautology.³⁰

Having identified the implacable evilness of terrorists and terrorism the neoconservative argument then goes on to claim that any attempt at understanding terrorism amounts to justifying it. Michael Walzer in his essay, 'Terrorism: A Critique of Excuses' argues that understanding terrorism 'takes the form of apologetic descriptions and explanations, a litany of excuses that steadily undercuts our knowledge of the evil.'³¹ The 'excuses' that he alludes to include claims such as: terrorism is a last resort, terrorism is a weapon of the weak, terrorism is the only available means justified by a higher end, and finally terrorism is the 'universal resort' i.e. all politics is terrorism. By examining and rejecting each of these arguments Walzer claims to demonstrate that the explanations, offered by commentators and terrorists, are in fact excuses and therefore invalid justifications for terrorism. One problem with Walzer's argument is that the standard 'explanations' that he identifies are in fact straw men and so are easily knocked down. The 'explanations' are often presented, in more complex forms by left-wing commentators. As we shall see, however, these arguments fall far short of a sincere and serious attempt to understand terrorism and so Walzer's claim does not stand up to scrutiny. Understanding and justification are not necessarily linked, but we ought to take the neoconservative claim as a warning, and ensure that we do not carelessly slip from one mode to the other.

1.2.6 Problems with the Neoconservative Account

By attempting to forestall serious investigation and understanding of terrorism the neoconservative account only serves its own political prejudices and aims. It leaves us with an anaemic and polemical account of terrorism that is dangerous and ill-conceived. If terrorism cannot, and should not, be understood, only exorcised and destroyed, then we are left with the terrifying prospect of an endless and escalating spiral of state and non-state violence. Terry Eagleton makes the same basic point, but also draws our attention to an interesting contradiction in the neoconservative account of terrorism:

In the so-called war against terror, 'evil' is used to foreclose the possibility of historical explanation. [...] In the disparagement of rational analysis which it

³⁰ Benjamin Netanyahu "Terrorists and Freedom Fighters" pp.29-30

³¹ Michael Walzer "Terrorism: A Critique of Excuses" p.238

suggests, it reflects something of the fundamentalism it confronts. Explanation is thought to be exculpation. Reasons become excuses. Terrorist assault is just a surreal sort of madness... [...] On this somewhat obtuse theory, to explain why someone behaves as they do is to demonstrate that they could not have acted otherwise, thus absolving them of responsibility. [...]

The truth is that unless you act for a reason, your action is irrational and you are probably absolved of blame for it. [...] Acting for a reason involves creatively interpreting the forces which bear in upon us, rather than allowing them to smack us around like snooker balls; and such interpretation involves a degree of freedom. It is inadvisable to caricature your enemy as crazy or spurred on by bestial passion, since morally speaking this lets him off the hook. You must decide whether you are going to see him as evil or mad. Unless we can propose some reasons for why people act as they do, we are not speaking of specifically human behaviour at all, and questions of innocence or guilt become accordingly irrelevant. Moral action must be purposive action: we would not call tripping over a stone morally reprehensible, or wax morally indignant over a rumble in the gut. Reasons may be morally repugnant, but actions without them cannot be.³²

If terrorists are truly irrational and thus acting without *any* intelligible reason, then their actions must have been sufficiently determined by forces outside of their control. If this is the case then they cannot be held morally culpable for their actions—a conclusion that would certainly not be palatable for neoconservatives.

The popular correlate of the neoconservative account of Islamist terrorism is the vocabulary commonly employed by the Western media and in political discourse to describe the phenomenon. Polemical designations including ‘extremist,’ ‘radical’ and ‘militant’ are used as euphemisms for words such as ‘Islamist’ and ‘terrorist;’ words that are considered to cast a too definitive description of the action.³³ Along with the words ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘fanaticism’ these terms do not only pick out a certain type of action, they also serve as an explanation for its occurrence. Or to put it more precisely the explanation consists in ending the possibility of understanding the action by locating the behaviour of the actor beyond the limits of reasonableness and thus reason. These types of words merely imply the actor believes something strongly (extremist/radical/fundamentalist) and as a result is willing to use violence (militant) occasionally against innocent civilians (fanaticism/terrorism).³⁴ What exactly it is they believe is either entirely disregarded as unimportant or unknowable.

³² Terry Eagleton *Holy Terror* pp.116-117

³³ See BBC Editorial Guidelines: “Guidance Terrorism, Use of Language When Reporting”

³⁴ We are not claiming that these words cannot be useful in any circumstance—and with some care we shall find it necessary to utilize some of them later—but that their common usage tends to obscure our understanding of terrorism rather than clarify it.

Ordinarily when the word 'Islamist' is employed it is used as a synonym with these other terms, and so firmly within the irrational mode of accounting for terrorism.

1.2.7 Left-wing Account of Terrorism

If the neoconservative account denudes terrorism of meaning in order to advance its political aims then the left-wing account tries to explain too much and in so doing superimposes its own political views onto the actions of terrorists. For example, a leftist commentator may broadly argue that America is a neo-imperialist actor subjugating the weak to its political and economic will; then they will explain a terrorist attack against America as the lashing out of the global dispossessed against the powerful. The political grievances of the commentator are thus mapped directly onto the terrorists; even if the terrorist's rhetoric suggests that the reasons for their action lie elsewhere, the commentator argues that these are manifestations of the *real* grievances masked in a local idiom. Noam Chomsky is the best known public commentator who utilises this mode of explanation. In several books and interviews following 9/11 Chomsky follows a standard leftist model for discussing terrorism. First there is a perfunctory condemnation of the act of terrorism, the 'horrifying atrocities,' followed by a wholesale attack on U.S. neo-imperialism and hypocrisy, their support for Israeli aggression, Western neo-colonial economic globalisation and so on.³⁵ The underlying argument is that the terror of the weak is a reaction to the vastly more destructive, structural terror of the strong.

1.2.8 Problems with the Left-wing Account

The main force of Chomsky's argument is not to seriously understand terrorism, but is a critique against both the neoconservative account of terrorism and the political positions that inform this account. The terrorism itself is treated as a mere symptom of a much more fundamental and important problem and as such is more-or-less ignored by the leftist critique. The 'terrorism' that they want to talk about rests on a definition of terrorism that conflates the violent and coercive activities of states with that of non-state actors.³⁶ 'Is there any political violence,' Ted Honderich rhetorically asks, 'that is *not* intended to work by causing terror or

³⁵ Noam Chomsky 9-11 p.11

³⁶ The conflation of terrorism with other violent activities will be discussed further in the section on defining terrorism.

fear?”³⁷ It is the ‘war on terror’ that concerns them and the dominant Western political-economic neo-liberalist ideology, globalisation, capitalism and even Zionism that lies behind it. One further problem with both the politicised modes of explanation is that their accounts of terrorism are often aimed at denouncing the political-philosophy of the other. We have already seen Walzer’s ‘critique of excuses’ that was levelled against the explanations of the leftist commentators and Eagleton’s attack on paradoxes inherent in the neoconservative logic. By aiming their conceptual guns at one another any possibility of understanding terrorism is lost in the din of the crossfire.

The fixation on the Western response to terrorism eventually leads, according to many leftist academics, to the inversion of non-state terrorism and state counterterrorism—it is the latter that causes the former:

On this basis, my conclusion is that terrorism is not the first, original cause of the so-called war against terrorism formulated and declared by Bush (a first cause that would justify this war precisely as war against terrorism); nor does anti-American terrorism precede the war that has been waged against it as a response to it. Terrorism (as well as its symbol, 9/11) is instead the true effect or the real consequence of the war against terrorism that the United States has been waging for decades in numerous parts of the world. In other words, war is the true cause of that which it declares it is fighting—namely terrorism.³⁸

Whilst we do not wish to deny the complex interplay between non-state terrorism and the actions of the state, it is disingenuous to effectively ignore the ideology of the terrorists and instead transpose one’s own political grievances onto their behaviour. Not only does it come close to justifying terrorism, as the neoconservatives claim, but much more problematically it stymies any possibility of understanding terrorism. The strident polemic of the left-wing commentators effectively mutes the voice and ideas of the Islamists in a similar way as the neoconservative account.

1.2.9 Rational Choice Account of Terrorism

So far we have discussed the deficiencies in the psychological and politicised accounts of terrorism. The former was easily located in the explanation methodology however it is more

³⁷ Ted Honderich *After The Terror* p.97

³⁸ Angelica Nuzzo “Reasons for Conflict: Political Implications of a Definition of Terrorism”

difficult to categorise the politicised accounts. By superimposing their own partisan political beliefs onto the topic they fail to engage seriously in explanation or understanding. We shall now examine one last explanatory framework that is quite different from the psychological account. The rational choice account of terrorism explicitly rejects the 'irrational' or 'fanatic' model of terrorists and instead claims that the actions of terrorists are best explained if we consider them to be rational actors efficiently pursuing their preferred ends.

Rational choice theory is most vigorously pursued by Robert Pape in his precisely named book *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. His study is a rejection of the 'irrational,' or 'religious fundamentalist' account, stating that 'most suicide terrorism is undertaken as a strategic effort directed toward particular political goals; it is not simply the product of irrational individuals or an expression of fanatical hatreds.'³⁹ He comes to this conclusion after conducting an empirical study of incidents of suicide terrorism and discovering a statistical correlation between its repeated occurrence and national-separatist struggles. 'What nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common,' Pape claims, 'is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.'⁴⁰ Fundamentalist religious beliefs, by contrast, are poor predictors of suicide terrorism, as is demographic profiling.⁴¹

1.2.10 Problems with the Rational Choice Account

As with the psychological account Pape uses empirical data to uncover correlations between certain variables and terrorist behaviour. The psychological account looked for these variables in the psychological properties of individuals; the sociological account looked for them in the socio-economic background of terrorists. Pape's search for the relevant variables took place in the professed causes of terrorist groups. By indentifying in the data a correlation with a specific political end, Pape can model suicide terrorism as a strategic, and therefore, rational behaviour that is employed as the most efficient and effective method to pursue this end.⁴² One advantage of using rational choice theory over other explanatory accounts is that it

³⁹ Robert A. Pape *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* p.27

⁴⁰ Robert A. Pape *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* p.4

⁴¹ Robert A. Pape *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* p.17

⁴² The reason for Pape's result is the predominance in the data of the Tamil Tiger group, a national-separatist movement who pioneered the use of suicide terrorism. It seems probable that if Pape's dataset—covering the

links means and ends so we at least have purposeful actors who commit terrorism as a means of attaining a goal. However with rational choice theory the preferences are always given and ordered, it has nothing to say, for instance why the actor holds those preferences and not others, or why certain preferences are ordered above others. We end up with an account that views terrorists as automata rationally, efficiently and mechanically pursuing their goals. In other words like all the other explanatory account there is a barrier to understanding, the thing that makes the actions, and the actors, meaningful, is ignored. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on instrumental rationality precludes the possibility that terrorist acts are in part symbolically orientated.

One final problem is that Pape treats the goals of groups and individuals who employ suicide terrorism as discrete and clearly identifiable. The Tamil Tigers, who form the largest sub-dataset in Pape's study, are taken to be pursuing a national-separatist goal, to form an independent Tamil state. It is unlikely, however, that this was their only objective; no doubt goals to correct issues surrounding identity, historical political, economic and social discrimination were also mixed together with their overarching aim. Furthermore, the goals of movements are often not fixed, but are malleable depending on the successes or failures of the group, changes in leadership and so on. Priorities also change over time; sometimes the mere survival of a movement becomes the ultimate goal. Communication is also imperfect both internally and externally and it is likely that there will be intra-group divisions regarding goals and the best way to pursue them—and some of these divisions will lead to paradoxical goals and means being pursued. All this means that within a terrorist movement multiple ends are not known fully either to insiders or outsiders. Essentially the ends of a movement are multiple, changeable, shifting in priority, paradoxical and not entirely known to insiders or outsiders; rather than discrete, known, and ordered as rational choice theory necessarily assumes.

1.2.11 Understanding Terrorism: Historical-Narrative Understanding of Terrorism

Having examined politicised and explanatory accounts of terrorism we can now turn to methodologies that aim to 'understand' terrorism. The principle category here is meaning; actors are assumed to mean something by their actions and it is possible to discern this

period 1980-2003—was updated by a few years the results would be drastically altered by the vast number of 'suicide terrorist' attacks in Iraq.

meaning through interpretive understanding. One way in which terrorism has been understood, especially after 9/11, is through what we shall call the 'narrative' methodology. The central claim is that the existence and actions of a movement and individuals can only be understood by constructing a narrative retelling of their history. This involves telling the stories of the principle individual actors, movements and texts and discovering their connections, continuities, discontinuities and pathways of influences upon each other. A good narrative will also describe and link the historical and social context of a movement with its inception, growth and development. Narrative accounts of Islamist terrorism range from the journalistic style that include first-hand experiences of the personalities and movements by the author and tends to be driven by the excitement of the narrative, to the academic style that primarily utilises second-hand sources and texts and concentrates on historical detail and accuracy.⁴³

There are several advantages to the narrative approach to understanding terrorism. Hannah Arendt argues that 'action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants.'⁴⁴ It requires the backwards gaze of the historian as a storyteller to discern the meaning of actions: 'even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and "makes" the story.'⁴⁵ The relationship between narrative, history and meaning is complex and the use of the term 'storyteller' is in itself telling. There is no singularly truthful narrative to be told but a multitude of competing narratives some of which will contradict one another, others that can co-exist side-by-side.

The 'story' or narrative is not discovered but is necessarily constructed by the historian as the storyteller. Certain events, actors and context will need to be weighed for their significance. Connections, currents, continuities and discontinuities are theorised that link disparate events into a coherent narrative. Order is imposed on the chaos of events; coherence is discerned in the flux of history. The multiplicity of narratives does not necessarily mean that all narratives are equally valid; certain narratives are judged—by the sense they make of history—better or more valid than others. There is not, however, a singularly truthful narrative that can be

⁴³ Examples of the journalistic style includes Jason Burke's *Al-Qaeda*, Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower*, Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda* and Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon's *The Next Attack*. The more scholarly narrative studies include Giles Kepel's *Jihad* and Marc Sageman's *Understanding Terror Networks*.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition* p.192

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition* p.192

discovered in practice, or postulated in theory. By definition interpretive understanding seeks to interpret human action to discern its meaning, but all acts of interpretation are open to revision; there is no God's eye view of human history—or at least not one we have access to.

The impossibility of finally discovering the meaning of a human action is the reason that the naturalists shy away from the category of understanding, preferring instead the presumed stability and objectivity of the natural sciences. The charge of relativism is the price that one pays by utilizing interpretive understanding but the anaemic state of explanatory accounts that ignore meaning, means that this is a price that must be paid. There are ways that absolute relativism—to coin an oxymoron—can be mitigated against through the device of storytelling. The insights into human meaning that are revealed by the historical-narrative method are balanced against its deceptions—its strengths are also the source of its weaknesses. Storytelling will always include an element of fiction that postulates connections where there are none, glosses over discontinuities, and where events are unknown there will be a temptation to fill out the gaps. The narrative author, when telling a history, will be tempted to sacrifice accuracy and detail in favour of a compelling storyline, to impose one's narrative on events, rather than to read narratives from events. Entertainment, especially with an exciting subject like terrorism, may be preferred over accuracy.⁴⁶

Despite these problems the narrative-historian is still necessary for interpretive understanding. The actors caught up and enmeshed in the unfolding of history can only attain a partial understanding of the significance and meaning of their actions. 'All accounts told by the actors themselves, though they may in rare cases give an entirely trustworthy statement of intentions, aims, and motives, become mere useful source material in the historian's hands and can never match his story in significance and truthfulness.'⁴⁷ The most significant benefit provided by a narrative is that by placing events in their historical context we can make sense of them. History, meaning and narrative are conceptually inseparable. Terrorism, and terrorist movements, do not spontaneously arise out of nowhere, they have a history—or more precisely histories—and only through these histories can we hope to understand terrorism.

Many academic texts on terrorism treat the phenomenon as though it can be talked about abstracted away from the history of terrorist movements, discussing, for instance, the

⁴⁶ This is especially problematic with journalistic-style accounts of terrorism.

⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition* p.192

networks that constitute terrorist movements, how they organize themselves and recruit new individuals, and the technologies of violence that they exploit—as though terrorism is ‘just there’ waiting to be theorised.⁴⁸ Others acknowledge a history but diminish its significance through a cursory examination that takes the history for granted or do not recognize Islamists’ deep historical roots.⁴⁹ We dispute both of these types of accounts because terrorism is always a concrete phenomenon embedded in the history and context of the particular movement that practices it. Terrorism as a purely abstract action-type, therefore, cannot be usefully understood.

As we have discussed there are multiplicities of narratives that can coexist alongside one-another—there are different types of histories to be told. Narratives cannot help but identify historical currents; otherwise they would just be temporally-ordered lists of unconnected events of unknown significance and thus meaningless. Just as there is no singularly truthful history, so too there is no singularly compelling historical force. The only way that we can extricate ourselves from hopeless relativism is to ask how much *sense* the historical forces we identify, make of events. If a particular history helps us understand events and discovers meaning in human action, then it is useful history, no more and no less.

One example of an excellent but flawed historical narrative of Islamist terrorism is Gilles Kepel’s *Jihad: On the Trail of Political Islam*. Kepel examines the historical rise and spread of political Islam from the 1960s to the 1990s and its decline from the mid-1990s to 9/11. He charts Islamism’s development in Egypt, the Arab states and Pakistan, and its subsequent spread to Southeast Asia, Sudan and Afghanistan; followed by its degeneration into violent *jihad* and terrorism in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia and Algeria. The historical narrative that Kepel constructs is one of rise, spread and decline. Broadly speaking the historical driving force that he identifies behind Islamism’s rise is the alignment of economic, social and political interests of the urban poor, students, the devout middle class and bazaar-owning entrepreneurs that allowed them to unite under the Islamist ideology against repressive ruling classes. When these interests inevitably become misaligned the movement falls apart, the

⁴⁸ See Jessica Stern *The Ultimate Terrorists* and Marc Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks*

⁴⁹ See Quintan Wiktorowicz *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* and Stephen Vertigans *Militant Islam: A Sociology of Characteristics, Causes and Consequences*

ideology loses its social base and the fanatical element, the 'jihadist-salafists' takes control resulting in outbreaks of undirected terrorist violence.⁵⁰

The Islamist ideology for Kepel is a useful political fiction for coordinating the actions of disparate groups with shared interests. In other words it is the socio-economic interests that provide the real motivation for action, but they are cloaked in an ideological disguise. Kepel makes the dependent relationship of ideology on social interests clear:

In the final analysis, any ideology's attractions, and the limits of those attractions, depend on how it adapts to the perceived needs of a society. The successes and failures of the Islamist movement in the twentieth century, from the time of the Muslim brothers to the present, show this trend very clearly.⁵¹

Kepel makes an error by not taking the Islamist ideology seriously enough and so makes the mistake of interpreting Islamist terrorism as the final 'paroxysm of violence' for a movement that, having lost its social base, was in terminal decline.⁵² Kepel identifies in the al-Qaeda ideology the transcendental impulse, what he calls 'the mystique of jihad,' that tends towards acts of symbolic, spectacular but irrational acts of violence, but he fails to acknowledge the rational pragmatism that contains and directs this violence.⁵³ Kepel also fails to account for the power and durability of an ideology that was able to evolve and adapt to new political realities and balances of power. We are not denying the usefulness and thus validity of Kepel's narrative, but offering a critique of his conceptual account of ideology. Like the psychological and neoconservative account Kepel fails to interpret meaning in Islamist terrorism, falling back instead on the inscrutable language of irrational fanaticism. Our particular historical-narrative of the Islamist movement aims to correct this mistake by taking ideology seriously. For that we must turn to an examination of what we shall call the ideological understanding of terrorism.

1.2.12 Understanding Terrorism through Ideology

Most of the explanatory methods that we have examined share an attempt to theorise a general a type of social action—terrorism—rather than the historically specific phenomenon

⁵⁰ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.220

⁵¹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.30

⁵² Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.225

⁵³ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.376

of Islamist terrorism. The basic premise is that the particular cause for which the action is undertaken (religious, nationalist, anarchist) is of secondary importance for explaining the type of behaviour that is common to them all. It is doubtful that studying 'terrorism' in the abstract is a useful exercise. Removed from its context terrorism becomes a mere technique devoid of meaning. Robin Collingwood conceived of all human history as the history of thought and it is the history of the ideas that together form the Islamist ideology that we shall attempt to capture.⁵⁴ This study is concerned not with terrorism as a generic category of action but with the Islamist movement, its ideology and its terrorist behaviour. Our central claim is that terrorism committed in the name of Islam can be usefully understood by charting the historical development of the Islamist ideology and Islamist movements.⁵⁵ This means that we shall take all ideas and beliefs seriously including religious ideas. What may appear as 'fanatical' or 'irrational' religious beliefs must remain open to interpretive understanding. Steve Bruce, in his study of fundamentalisms writes in this regard:

I cannot accept that, as a matter of principle, we should suppose religion to be without consequences. It would be bizarre of something that took up so much of so many people's wealth and time, and that so dominated so many cultures, did not matter: that it merely served as a cafeteria of convenient legitimations for any sort of behaviour.⁵⁶

Although Bruce refers specifically to religious beliefs we shall extend his principle to all ideas and beliefs contained within the Islamist ideology. Further on in his study Bruce identifies a:

major divide among social scientists in their general orientation to the role of religion in social action. Do religious beliefs cause people to do things or do people act as they do for mundane economic, political or social reasons and then use their religious repertoire to provide a justification for their actions?⁵⁷

We have already discussed the problems with the second option where religious ideological beliefs are presumed to rationalise more basic drives. The first option, whereby religious beliefs are said to cause actions, is too deterministic and simplistic. The relationship between ideology and action is complex and will be discussed in more detail later. A third option is

⁵⁴ R.G. Collingwood cited in Peter Winch *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* p.131

⁵⁵ One example of an attempt to analyse the post-9/11 Islamist ideology is Jeffrey Haynes's "Al-Qaeda: Ideology and Action."

⁵⁶ Steve Bruce *Fundamentalism* p.103

⁵⁷ Steve Bruce *Fundamentalism* pp.102-103

that religious beliefs—or more precisely religious elements of ideology—are just as mundane, ordinary and basic as ‘economic, political [and] social’ reasons. Only by taking religious beliefs seriously, and not as rationalisations or pseudo-beliefs, can we seek to genuinely understand religious ideologies. One may be required to undertake the initial ‘leap of faith’ to accept the basic fundamental truth of Islam in order to entertain the Islamist ideology, however this merely the starting point, it does not follow that the rest of the ideology is a matter of irrational or blind faith. This is particularly the case when the central core of the ideology explicitly subsumes political, economic and social truths into religious claims. Instead of saying ideology causes action, we say that ideology allows us to understand actions, but to understand ideology we must also understand actions. It is clear that interpretive understanding is not a linear process: understanding ideology requires understanding of actions, and to understand actions one must understand ideology. Earlier we stated that history, meaning and narrative are conceptually intertwined; we can now add that ideology, actions and meaning are similarly interconnected.

This study aims to enter into this web and make some sense of it. To understand human action, as we discussed earlier is ‘grasping the *point* or *meaning* of what is being said and done.’⁵⁸ Although understanding a foreign ‘form of life,’ to use Wittgenstein’s phrase, is difficult and exposed to the danger of imposing one’s own conceptual structure onto the discourse under study the alternative of turning one’s back on understanding is intellectually tempting but unacceptable. Other academics who have been superficially committed to the method of interpretive understanding balk when faced with its sheer otherness. Bruce, despite striking out in the right direction eventually capitulates to this temptation when he describes ‘the thoroughly religious crusade or, in the language of Islam, the jihad. In pursuit of its *universal mission to conquer the entire world* for Allah, Iran attempted to export its Islamic revolution. Osama Bin Laden is a Saudi Arab but he fought against the Great Satan in Afghanistan.’⁵⁹ The hyperbole of fanatical irrationalism is never far away when talking about the Islamist ideology and terrorism and so must be constantly guarded against. Just as we shall not exclude any ideas from interpretive understanding we shall also not exclude any actions—no matter how morally abhorrent—from the possibility of containing meaning. Unlike the neoconservatives who claim that evil cannot or should not be understood we shall

⁵⁸ Peter Winch *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* p.115

⁵⁹ Steve Bruce *Fundamentalism* pp.8-9 Emphasis added.

endeavour to describe and understand the evolution of the Islamist ideology and movement, not to evaluate it.

One major advantage with the ideological approach to terrorism is that it can at least begin to reconcile the extremes presented by the 'irrational' and 'rational' models of terrorism. Martha Crenshaw struggles with these two paradoxical aspects of terrorism when she writes:

Even the most extreme and unusual forms of political behavior can follow an internal, strategic logic. If there are consistent patterns in terrorist behavior, rather than random idiosyncrasies, a strategic analysis may reveal them. ... Terrorism can be considered a reasonable way of pursuing extreme interests in the political arena.... It is one among the many alternatives that radical organizations can choose. Strategic conceptions, based on ideas of how best to take advantage of the possibilities of a given situation, are an important determinant oppositional terrorism, as they are the government response. However, no single explanation for terrorist behavior is satisfactory. Strategic calculation is only one factor in the decision-making process leading to terrorism. But it is critical to include strategic reasoning as a possible motivation, at a minimum as an antidote to stereotypes of "terrorists" as irrational fanatics.⁶⁰

We cited Jessica Stern's argument earlier that claimed that the more 'extreme' terrorism was 'expressive' and it is this aspect that Crenshaw seems to be trying to grasp. A more productive way of understanding the 'irrational' element of terrorism is to reconceptualise it as either 'expressive' or 'symbolic.' 'Most social scientific attempts at theory of terrorism,' Wilkinson correctly points out, 'suffer from a fatal flaw: they neglect the role and influence of terrorist ideologies and beliefs in inspiring and guiding revolutionary terrorist organisations and in nourishing hatred and violence.'⁶¹ Only by understanding the Islamist ideology can both the rational-strategic explanation of terrorism be reconciled with the expressive value-rationality aspect of terrorism to synthesise an interpretive understanding of terrorism within its historical context. As we shall see in detail later only by recognising the ability of ideology to contain both instrumental and value rationality can these two paradoxical aspects of terrorism be understood and adequately accounted for.

Wittgenstein's analogy of a length of thread—one that he used in relation to language—is instructive for understanding ideology. Within a length of thread fibres overlap and intertwine together to create the thread. Although no single fibre runs the entire length of the

⁶⁰ Martha Crenshaw "The Logic of Terrorism" p.24

⁶¹ Paul Wilkinson *Terror and the Liberal State* p.96

thread their overlapping creates the appearance of a single continuous thread and its continuity along its entire length.⁶² Likewise the history and development of ideologies, and ideological movements, may not have a single shared idea that runs unchanged from beginning to end, but are instead composed of overlapping ideas and movements, that combine to create the appearance of a homogenous, static ideology, or ideological movement. We have to recognise, however that ideologies, are in fact dynamic, and so to understand an ideology we must examine its history, its continuities and discontinuities, the wax and wane of ideas, the paradigm shifts that occur at critical moments of crises and triumphs; in short we should seek to describe the *evolution* of the Islamist ideology.⁶³ Furthermore, as we have already stated, theory and practice are intimately linked, so we must study the history of the movements that embody the ideology and its evolution—the changes in organization, the shifts in power, the rise and fall of its intellectual and political leaders, and so forth. Finally, we must undertake these examinations in tandem to see the links between ideological theory and its practice in-the-world, how they interact with one-another, and examine the complex ways that changes in one ripple across to effect the other. By collecting together the threads of these connected histories we hope to draw a coherent and compelling narrative that ultimately helps explain the forms of both the movement and the ideology at a moment in history, and perhaps point to their evolving forms in the future.

1.2.13 Limitations of the Ideology-Narrative Methodology

As we saw in the previous section the idea of constructing a narrative is also problematic—once again we should note that there will certainly be more than one narrative that can be told of any ideology or its movements, thus it would not be correct to describe our narrative as ‘true’ in a definitive and exclusive sense. However, if we define a narrative as a fiction that makes useful sense of the facts, or to return to the previous analogy, the collecting together of fibres—historical events, important writings etc.—into a coherent and understandable thread of a story, then we can tentatively claim that some narratives are ‘truer’ than others. Every history is an imagined narrative—one that must discriminate against and for, select and

⁶² Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* §67

⁶³ The source texts that we shall use in this study will be a mixture of historic and journalist accounts of the history of the Islamist movement—in order to provide us with the historical and intellectual context—and translations of the works of the main Islamist thinkers. We should note that this does not constitute primary historical research as we are not returning to the original source material. However this is not the aim of the study, we are merely using the history to understand the evolution of the ideology, and using the ideology to understand the historical development of the movement.

disregard, and rank in importance, certain documents, events and characters over others, in telling its story—and this is a problem that this thesis will not attempt to overcome. This does not mean, of course, that all histories are equal and the value of our narrative will be judged on the ‘sense’ that it makes of the events and texts it examines—it will however, always be a provisional narrative that is open to the discovery of new historical facts, and the application of new modes of interpretation.

The challenge of critically describing a narrative of the evolution of an ideology and its movement must be tempered in several respects. We have already noted that to talk about ideology in the singular is misleading—ideology, by containing competing or even contradictorily ideas will always tend to split apart; it is inherently fractious. Therefore it is more correct to talk about ideologies in the plural although for the sake of style we shall continue to use the singular form, but this will not distract us from the discontinuities, disjunctions and cracks in the ideology’s history. Similarly, and for largely the same reasons, there are usually movements—rather than a single movement—connected with the ideology, and the alliances, affinities, differences and power struggles will both reflect and cause ideological fracturing, as well as play a major role in the historical evolution of the movements.

We have argued that advancing our understanding of an ideology and its ideological movements can be achieved through critically describing and analysing their historical narratives. At the same time we have highlighted the broad difficulties and dangers in this methodology; there is however, an interesting, even ironic, separate problematic that is worth noting. Ideology, in its functional role as a map for understanding the socio-political world, also tends to simplify complex situations—to make them comprehensible and navigable for the actor—and this extends to imagining simplified and narrowly partisan narratives for complex histories. To use a stark example, we should expect that the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would appear as very different narratives to a Jewish settler and a Palestinian refugee.⁶⁴ As with every aspect of ideology historical narratives are imagined through a complex and interactive process. The core beliefs that constitute the ideology will

⁶⁴ The narrative of this history would presumably stretch much further back than the founding of the state of Israel, perhaps as far back as biblical times. The stitching together of history and mythology would be unproblematic as ideology produces a ‘narrative’ which is more concerned with creating a coherent and compelling story—an imagined past—than a factually accurate account of past events.

guide the imagining of the narrative and likewise the imagined narratives will dynamically shape and reinforce the core beliefs. The fact that ideology plays a fundamental role in shaping historical narratives means that it will also create narratives that explain, mythologize and naturalise its own history and existence. This will often take the form of an ideology imagining itself to be permanent and unchanging, and present its beliefs as non-ideological.⁶⁵ These points are worth noting both because they constitute an interesting aspect of ideology theory, but also as a warning that we should be careful not to uncritically accept the historical narrative myths imagined by the ideology under study, and in particular the myths that justify and explain the core beliefs that constitute the ideology.

Any ambiguities that disrupt the cogency of the imagined narratives are either ignored or resolved—often with reference to some unseen event or text. The more imaginative the narrative has to be to account for anomalous ‘facts’ the more it acquires the characteristics of paranoia by frequently referring to hidden conspiracies that exert great power behind the scenes of history. These observations should help to resolve a fundamental question for the study of ideology. Although we have pointed out the numerous difficulties of attaining a neutral viewpoint from which to describe and understand ideologies, there is a more fundamental question that should determine our methodology: is an ideology better understood from the ‘inside’ or ‘outside?’⁶⁶ Does one, for example, have to subscribe to an Islamist ideology to be able to fully understand it?

We have already seen that by definition there is no singularly truthful description that can be made of an ideology; however this does not automatically lead to the relativist position that all claims are equally valid. We could, therefore, say that both the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ perspectives will yield interesting but partial accounts of the ideology. However, given the self-reflective nature of ideology and its internal mechanisms to mythologize its own history, and the histories that concern it, the ‘inside’ perspective is particularly fraught with difficulty. In fact, an ‘inside’ perspective that attempts to objectively describe their ideology will either just re-describe the ideology’s internal narratives or, if successful in attaining a degree of

⁶⁵ The appearance or claims, of an unchanging, permanent, singular non-ideological truth are, paradoxically, the hallmarks of ideological thinking. With our previous example we could speculate that the presence of such divergent ideologies with their historical narratives at striking odds could account for the obsession exhibited by all sides to create (superficial, but explicitly labelled, non-ideological) ‘facts-on-the-ground.’

⁶⁶ This question is sometimes raised through the assertion that it is impossible to understand an ideology from the ‘outside’ (or the ‘inside – depending on one’s perspective).

objectively, the actor will have, to some extent stepped outside of their ideological beliefs. In either case it should be clear that the ‘outside’ perspective will be more likely to yield a useful, semi-objective, understanding of the ideology—but to do so it would need to draw upon the resources provided by ‘insider’ accounts of the ideology.⁶⁷

1.3 Ideology: Introduction

We have been using the concepts of ‘ideology’ and ‘terrorism’ quite freely but it is important to note that in both academic and lay discourses both are problematic. One could denounce terrorism as an irredeemably ideological concept. Accordingly, who is, or is not, a terrorist depends entirely on one’s partisan ideological viewpoint. This is captured in the perennial cliché ‘one man’s terrorist, is another man’s freedom fighter.’⁶⁸ Does this mean that we should dispose of both concepts? Clichés, despite, or perhaps because of, their endless repetition and uncritical internalisation, contain elements of truth. It is probably correct to say that the real world usage of ‘terrorism’ has rendered it with permanent negative connotations.⁶⁹ In almost all recent regular and irregular conflicts each side will invoke the rhetorical, and often substantial, accusation of terrorism to condemn their enemy. Although it is beyond reasonable expectations to rescue the language of terrorism as an intellectually productive concept in everyday speech, it is our contention that it is not, to paraphrase Daniel Bell, ‘an irretrievably fallen word.’⁷⁰

Bell, however, was referring to ‘ideology,’ not terrorism, in making that claim. His point was not just that ‘ideology’ had been irreversibly tainted through rhetorical abuse but that it had become a philosophically bankrupt concept. According to Bell’s thesis the great ideologies of the 20th century had reached a state of exhaustion and would now diminish and disappear to be replaced by a technocratic, non-ideological system of administration-led governance. As part of the ‘end of ideology’ movement in the 1950s, Bell was a forerunner to the ‘end of

⁶⁷ Ed Husain’s *The Islamist* is a popular example of an ‘insider’ account and illustrates both its strengths and flaws. Whilst offering an interesting and detailed account of the author’s journey into an Islamist movement, the latter part of the book falls back on the tired stereotypes of the ‘radical’ and ‘irrational’ Islamist ideology—whereby the ideology merely serves as a rationalisation for violence and the channelling of frustrations of young British Muslims.

⁶⁸ Gerald Seymour *Harry’s Game: A Novel* p.87

⁶⁹ See Igor Primoratz “What Is Terrorism?”

⁷⁰ Daniel Bell *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* p.406

history' thesis that became fashionable in the 1990s—and equally as premature in declaring the cessation of human political innovation and conflict.⁷¹

Despite these substantial problems we shall not discard our tools into a conceptual dustbin, but shall pursue a 'green' ethic of cleaning, recycling and reusing these concepts whilst acknowledging their limitations. Our task, therefore, is to corral the two 'damaged' pejoratives of 'ideology' and 'terrorism' and utilize them in an intellectually productive project to understand, analyse and demystify an interesting and important modern phenomena—the Islamist movement and terrorism. This will require not just defining our terms but also providing ourselves the theoretical tools required for our ideology-centred conceptual framework for understanding the Islamist movement. To this end we will sketch the historical development of the concept in order to both critically define and outline a general theory of ideology. We shall concentrate on the crucial contribution to ideology theory made by Marx and the three thinkers who followed in his footsteps: Mannheim, Gramsci and Althusser.

1.3.1 Karl Marx and Ideology

The word 'ideology' was first coined by an imprisoned Antoine Destutt de Tracy during the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution. He sought to systematise the study of ideas and create a branch of science that would classify and decode human ideas and analyse their psychological and social origins: to establish a 'science of ideas.' The project was informed by the enlightenment belief in the progress of science and served as a prelude to the logical positivists. This is reflected by the fact that de Tracy not only envisaged this new branch of science to study ideas, but it was also to eventually serve, through its systematic and empirical methodology, as a critical test that would reject or shape ideas from a rational basis.

The influence of Marx and Engels on the concept of ideology has been profound and it is worth examining their contribution, and that of those who followed in the Marxist tradition, in some detail. Marx and Engels' understanding of ideology, in contrast to Destutt's positivist optimism, is entirely negative. In *The German Ideology* they attack the young Hegelians who they accused of examining ideas as though they had an independent existence from the

⁷¹ See Gaylir Talshir "The Phoenix of Ideology" for a critique of Bell's 'end of ideology' thesis.

material world. In so doing the German idealists systematically distorted reality and turned philosophy into 'ideology' that obscured the true foundations of the world. Using the metaphor of a *camera obscura*, that inverts light to produce an upside-down image of the real world, they wrote:

in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down ... this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.⁷²

Marx located ideology within his base-superstructure social theory. The base—the social relations of production and the real foundation of society—determines the forms of consciousness that are embodied and reproduced by the various political, cultural, religious and legal institutions. As social relations change so does the economic base of society and with it the social consciousness of society. Marx's contemporaneous idealist philosophers had it precisely the wrong way round, consciousness, or ideas, do not determine social relations, instead the material mode of production determines consciousness.

Crucially, Marx also attached the concept of ideology to his class theory, famously stating: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force.'⁷³ Ideology did not merely distort reality, it was also a tool of power that served the interests of the ruling class and subjugated the working class. The stability of the economic system is ensured by the superstructure—the ideological complex, composed of religious belief, and the political and legal systems of power. These are systems of ideas that mystify the material base of society and legitimise the ruling class's privileged position and power. The ideas of these elite are either imposed upon or unconsciously internalized by the non-ruling classes creating a 'false consciousness' that distorts, explains or justifies their privileged economic and social position as natural, timeless and unchangeable facts—and conversely normalises in the minds of the working class their disadvantaged position and exploitation. Furthermore, ideology disguises itself giving it the paradoxical appearance of an unquestionable and unchanging non-ideological form. The contradictions that are inherent in the relations of production are papered over and obscured by ideology.

⁷² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *The German Ideology* cited in Terry Eagleton ed. *Ideology* p.24

⁷³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *The German Ideology* cited in Terry Eagleton ed. *Ideology* p.24

Within the Marxist theory we can detect the origins of the modern, popular understanding of ideology being equated with brainwashing, state-control or propaganda. Using this top-down model ideology is understood as the non-physical coercive means of the powerful elite controlling the masses who acquiesce under the delusion of freely giving consent to the social, economic and political order. Marx's influence on the moulding of the concept of ideology extends through to the present day. One important aspect was the idea of ideology as unquestioned dogma—an irrational and unchallenged set of received beliefs that serve as a smokescreen that obscures reality. This is combined with the linking of class and ideology which, even when some of the Marxist terminology is shed, still leaves ideology as a concept fused with the nefarious mechanisms of power, exploitation and control. The severe negative connotations that Marx attached to ideology meant that the task for future Marxists would be to uncover and unmask ideological structures in order to free ourselves from its mesmerising grip. Essentially ideology was something to be discovered and disposed of; like the state, ideology was something that a communist society would do without.

1.3.2 Karl Mannheim

Mannheim's work in *Ideology and Utopia* distinguishes between the 'particular' and 'total' forms of ideology. The former is defined as a more-or-less conscious attempt by an individual or group to bring their opponents round to their way of thinking or understanding the world. This is defined negatively by Mannheim as 'distortions ... conscious lies to half-conscious and unwitting disguises; from calculated attempts to dupe others to self-deception.'⁷⁴ The recognition by the targeted group or individual of this 'particular' form of ideology would involve the realization that capitulating to the ideology would not be in their true 'interests.' Mannheim presents ideology as an intermediary between a complex form of both a lie and an error. As a lie as it operates through the propagation of falsehoods for the benefits of some individual or group, or alternatively as an error, in the case of one's opponent being unaware of the deception. The 'total' conception of ideology is that of 'an age or of a concrete historico-social group' and refers to the 'total structure of the mind of this epoch or of this group.'⁷⁵ Whilst the manifestations of a 'particular' ideology can be traced back to the interests of one's opponent, the 'total' ideology is objectively determined

⁷⁴ Karl Mannheim *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* p.49

⁷⁵ Karl Mannheim *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* pp.49-50

by 'a given social situation.'⁷⁶ This all-inclusive, comprehensive and all-encompassing worldview or thought-system is labelled '*weltanschauung*' and reflects the historical and social conditions of the epoch.

This conception of ideology makes some important deviations from Marx. Mannheim's particular conception of ideology marks a departure from the unitary, monolithic ideology of Marx. It suggests that there are pluralities of ideologies representing various partisan interests that compete for attention. Furthermore, it recognises that there are multiple ways of thinking and therefore multiple ways of understanding the world and one's place in it.⁷⁷ This makes ideologies (as opposed to just 'ideology') worth examining in their own rights and opens the way towards a sociology of knowledge that seeks 'to understand systems of ideas rather than just unmask and discredit them.'⁷⁸ The move towards plurality, however, is held in check by the more orthodox Marxist conception of total ideology. This forms the historically determined conceptual mesh within which all particular ideologies are restrained. The total ideology operates at a deeper level than the particular conception. The latter operates at what Mannheim calls the 'psychological level' whereby it is possible for the 'victim' of a particular ideology is ultimately able to recognise his position and reject his opponent's deceptions. The total conception of ideology by contrast, operates at the 'noological level' whereby different historical epochs, or different social strata, have 'fundamentally divergent thought-systems and widely differing modes of experience and interpretation.'⁷⁹ As with Marx these historical epochs and social strata are essentially different modes of production, or the position of different classes vis-à-vis the relations of production, thus leading Mannheim back to the economically determined conception of ideology.

Although Mannheim compromises between a unitary and pluralist conception of ideology he does depart from orthodox Marxism in one further respect. Marx envisaged the withering away of ideology, along with the state, in a classless communist society. By contrast Mannheim makes the more convincing claim that ideology is a permanent feature of the social world. No matter what form social relations take there will always exist cognitive structures through which the world is interpreted and ordered by the individual. In a similar

⁷⁶ Karl Mannheim *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* p.50

⁷⁷ The idea of a multiplicity of ideologies each with their own internally coherent configuration of interpreting the world can be likened to Wittgenstein's concept of 'forms of life'.

⁷⁸ Terry Eagleton ed. *Ideology* p.50

⁷⁹ Karl Mannheim *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* p.51

vein to Marx, Mannheim conceptualises ideologies as comprehensive sets of ideas that are internalized unconsciously and uncritically as uncontroversial norms. The self-obfuscating nature of ideology conceals its presence and form from the individual or class. If ideology is permanent, comprehensive and camouflaged as rationalisations how is one to study it? Mannheim, in a move reminiscent of the groping truth-seeker from Plato's cave, suggests that the role of the intellectual is to detach themselves from ideology and provide what Michael Freeden calls 'an increasingly independent, non-subjective, interpretation of the world.'⁸⁰ However if one can only occupy one particular ideological position or another then how can an ideology be described by the social scientist without bias from their adopted ideological viewpoint?⁸¹ The very language betrays Mannheim's position, how can one 'interpret' the world from a non-interpretive position, i.e. can something be interpreted without having an interpretive standard against which to understand it? It seems that by failing to escape the dogma of the Marxist 'underlying reality' thesis Mannheim remains stuck in its paradoxical logic. This later became known as 'Mannheim's paradox' and demonstrates the impossibility of achieving a non-ideological position from which to objectively describe ideologies.

One useful methodological suggestion Mannheim makes to escape this paradox is to adopt what he pithily calls a 'non-evaluative general-total conception of ideology' whereby the social scientist conducts a 'historical investigation, where ... no judgments are pronounced as to the correctness of the ideas...'⁸² The changing social conditions of a society are studied by the scientist in order to understand the corresponding mental structures and modes of interpretation. 'According to this view,' states Mannheim, 'human thought arises, and operates, not in a social vacuum but in a definite social milieu.'⁸³ One useful way for the social scientist to understand ideological structures therefore is to study their social origins and in particular the texts, both written and non-written, that are the product of the society. By emphasising the interpretive access that the study of texts provides Mannheim's study of ideology segues with the tradition of German hermeneutics. Underlying the hermeneutical methodology is the claim that history, and by extension social structures and ideologies, can only be understood with reference to the meaning of 'every fact and event' and that all 'meaning in its turn always refers to another meaning.'⁸⁴ The web of interrelated and

⁸⁰ Michael Freeden *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* p.14

⁸¹ This difficulty ignores the more fundamental problem of the total conception of ideology.

⁸² Karl Mannheim *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* p.71

⁸³ Karl Mannheim *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* p.71

⁸⁴ Karl Mannheim *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* p.61

interdependent meanings can only be accessed through the careful interpretation of texts. By entering into the web of meanings and positively avoiding evaluative judgements the social scientist can mitigate Mannheim's paradox and describe, interpret and ultimately seek to understand the ideological structures and their origins under study.

1.3.3 Antonio Gramsci

If Mannheim made progress in advancing and maturing the Marxist account of the theory of ideology, Antonio Gramsci by contrast focussed on how ideology is created, reproduced and operates. Gramsci's most famous contribution was the transposition of the concept of 'hegemony' to the study of ideology. He claimed that the dominant social group exercised control by exerting cultural hegemony over subordinate classes in order to maintain their privileged position guaranteed by the *status quo*. This was a refinement of Marx and Engels' claim that the predominant ideas of an age are those of the ruling class and institutionalised by the state. Gramsci's insight lay in identifying that it was through the reproduction of culture that ideas came to dominate. Ideology was no longer something that had its origins in the state and its political, economic and legislative control of citizens, but instead operated within civil society and through the medium of culture. The hierarchy of the state and civil society was reversed, now it was the latter that normalised, legitimised and maintained the former.

Gramsci, by recognising the importance of civil society, also made an important distinction between the exertion of two different types of power—coercion and consent. The state and its institutions such as the police, legal system and, ultimately the armed forces, exercised power through coercion—the manipulation of behaviour through the use, or threat, of violence. By contrast civil society and its non-state institutions such as newspapers, theatres, trade unions and the family, exercised ideological power through the manufacturing of consent. In the capitalist system the ideology of the bourgeoisie wields the greatest cultural influence and thus insinuates itself as the dominant culture by normalising the capitalist ideology as 'common sense,' that is uncritically accepted norms that present themselves as universal, incontrovertible and uncontroversial and crucially, non-partisan.⁸⁵ This process is shown to work when the masses come to regard their own assent as freely-given and spontaneous; or

⁸⁵ Antonio Gramsci cited in David Forgacs ed. *A Gramsci Reader* pp.306-307

when the dominant ideology appears as non-ideological. This theory remains firmly within the Marxist paradigm as cultural hegemony prevents the working class from attaining recognition of their true status as an exploited group in the capitalist system therefore precludes them from gaining 'class consciousness.' These two modes of power are mutually reinforcing: 'the apparatus of state coercive power,' writes Gramsci, 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively.'⁸⁶

By remapping ideology within a cultural framework Gramsci made two important claims. Firstly, ideology is culturally produced and reproduced by various privileged groups and unconsciously consumed by others. Although Gramsci focussed on print media he acknowledged the theoretical power of audio and visual mediums writing that they possess 'a rapidity, a field of action, and an emotional simultaneity far greater than written communication.'⁸⁷ Secondly, we can deduce from Gramsci that certain producers will have greater cultural, and therefore ideological, influence than others. Dominant producers of culture, will tend to influence other smaller producers, therefore there will tend to be convergence towards a dominant ideological position.

Gramsci also thought that intellectuals wielded cultural influence due to their privileged position of formulating and acting as a cultural conductor of ideological positions. His definition of intellectuals was remarkably broad; it refers to anyone 'whose function in society is primarily that of organizing, administering, directing, educating or leaving others.'⁸⁸ The combination of the public intellectual and the exertion of cultural hegemony can clearly be seen in the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and Nazism. As with Marx it is often unclear whether Gramsci thought that the producers of culture deliberately and consciously promote an ideological position, or whether the ideology is unconsciously reflected in their cultural output. With the Nazism example it is clear that the techniques of manufacturing consent were carefully and purposefully harnessed to propagate and normalise the ideology as a consensus position, however it is less obvious whether a Hollywood director deliberately seeks to promote, for example, the capitalist ideology in their films. Despite this ambiguity it seems that Gramsci leant towards the former view when he writes: 'ideologies for the

⁸⁶ Antonio Gramsci cited in David Forgacs ed. *A Gramsci Reader* p.307

⁸⁷ Antonio Gramsci cited in David Forgacs ed. *A Gramsci Reader* p.376

⁸⁸ Antonio Gramsci cited in David Forgacs ed. *A Gramsci Reader* p.300

governed are mere illusions, a deception to which they are subject, while for the governing they constitute a willed and knowing deception.’⁸⁹

The idea of a fundamental reality obscured by ideology is reaffirmed by Gramsci and in this regard his conceptualisation of ideology contains the same limitations of Marx and Mannheim. Thus ideology is still a systematic distortion of reality that is negatively defined largely by its alleged function of legitimising capitalism. Despite this we can glean some useful insights from his work that concentrated on the production and reproduction of ideology. The idea that ideology is produced, reproduced, modified and subverted in a myriad of ways through various cultural mediums is clearly an important step towards understanding the complex processes involved in the formation and modification of ideologies. Instead of the monolithic top-down approach whereby an ideology is somehow imposed by the ruling class on the subaltern classes we have a more nuanced model of ideological formation. There is also a hint of a less authoritarian and more liberal framework for ideology, albeit one that Gramsci did not emphasise. In passing he claims that ‘ideology ... arose to lead the popular masses and ... therefore necessarily takes account of certain of their interests.’⁹⁰ At a minimum this means that ideologies must take some account of the masses’ interests—the ideology cannot be entirely foreign or antithetical to the interests of its adherents. If, however, we were to pursue this logic it could also mean that ideologies are created and recreated in a dynamic and complex interchange between those in and out of power—the rulers and the ruled—thus ideology could be imagined as a type of discourse that tends towards an equilibrium of competing interests.

As well as relocating the reproduction of ideology to the cultural sphere Gramsci also reconceived of ideology as ‘thought-practice.’ By this he meant that ideology is constructed through our concrete enacting of ideas in the world. He wrote that ‘men become conscious of their social position, and therefore of their tasks, on the terrain of ideology.’⁹¹ This was not however, a one-way process, ideology was also constantly recreated and shaped through men’s actions in the world. Thus ideas and practice are closely linked in an interdependent relationship, the evidence for which lies in our recurring behaviour, utterances and thought. By linking together ideas and actions Gramsci was effectively intermeshing theory and

⁸⁹ Antonio Gramsci cited in David Forgacs ed. *A Gramsci Reader* p.196

⁹⁰ Antonio Gramsci cited in David Forgacs ed. *A Gramsci Reader* p.198

⁹¹ Antonio Gramsci cited in David Forgacs ed. *A Gramsci Reader* p.196

practice. To understand ideology we need to closely observe repeated behaviour, particularly in the sphere of cultural reproduction, and conversely to interpret actions we must have an insight into the ideology that informs the actor. In contrast to Marx and Mannheim, for whom ideology was a one-way process, for Gramsci ideology and practice flows both ways.

1.3.4 Louis Althusser

In contrast to Gramsci's bidirectional conception of ideology Althusser reverted to Marx's theory that located ideology's principal function in ensuring the obedience of the working class to the ruling class. He did depart from Marxist orthodoxy by claiming that ideology exercised some autonomy from the economic base. Instead of simply being a systematic distorter of reality that should be critically exposed and discarded, ideology was considered by Althusser as being worthy of study. Furthermore, like Mannheim and Gramsci, Althusser considered ideology to be a permanent feature of the social world and so the utopian ideal of an ideologically-free society was chimerical to Althusser.

The autonomy that ideology enjoyed in Althusser's theory resulted from a distinction that he made between Repressive State Apparatus, such as the police and army, that operate through 'violence' and the Ideological State Apparatus, such as religious systems, the family, cultural institutions, the mass media and the education system, that exercise control through 'ideology.'⁹² Although this theoretical division had already been made by Gramsci, Althusser emphasised the role of institutions in the reproduction and dissemination of ideology, in particular the education system. Although he identified a plurality of institutions through which ideology operated ultimately he still retained the singular function of ideology that was present in Marx of maintaining the prevailing economic system. However, due to its autonomy ideology developed a 'life of its own' thus allowing a variety of ideological forms to develop within a single economic system. In short ideology's fundamental function was fixed within the Marxist paradigm, but the form it took on was not.

One further innovation that Althusser's work on ideology advanced was the claim that individuals, as opposed to classes, were ideological carriers. This idea was in contrast to orthodox Marxist thought that identified classes as the subjects and bearers of ideology. For

⁹² Louis Althusser cited in Terry Eagleton ed. *Ideology* pp.90-91

Althusser the subject constructed their identity—their understanding of their place in the world and the frame for their actions within it—through their individual ideological consciousness. As with Marx however, ideology does not reveal itself readily, and the paradoxical mark of ideological thinking is that it appears to the individual as natural, autonomous and spontaneous i.e. non-ideological. This is an important advance in the theory of ideology as it decentres ideology from its rigidly deterministic class origins in Marx and accounts for the diverse range of ideologies that may be found even within a notional ‘class.’ It also allows for a more nuanced understanding of the origins of an individual or group’s ideology through a study of their particular historical, cultural and social situation. After Althusser ideology can no longer be accounted for solely with reference to Marxist economic categories; the diversity of ideological influences is recognised to be virtually limitless.

As we have discussed the Marxist theory of ideology evolved from the monolithic distortion of reality found in Marx and Engels through to the gradually more nuanced, variegated and pluralistic accounts by Mannheim, Gramsci and Althusser. During this process Marx’s stolidly negative concept of ideology as a thing to be rid of in a classless society has slowly shed its purely pejorative overtones to be reconceptualised as a permanent but ever-changing feature of political and social life that can have positive effects as well as negative ones. The work done by these three thinkers—although still caught within the Marxist framework—has emancipated the concept of ideology so it can now be used as a useful theoretical concept. However the Marxist chains of economic determinism—whereby ideology is still seen as primarily a product and supporting mechanism for capitalism and class society—continue to shackle the concept. One constant theme of Marxist theory is the intimate and irreducible link between ideology and power. Specifically, the principal function of ideology is the maintenance of the current politico-economic *status quo* and its systems of control. Although this is clearly one important way in which ideology functions, by focussing exclusively on this element, they obscure the idea that ideology is necessarily present—and is of crucial importance—for groups that presently have little or no power and wish to upset the existing political and social order.

1.3.5 Defining Ideology

The task of defining ideology is not, perhaps, as daunting as it may first seem.⁹³ In light of our study of the Marxist conception of ideology it seems that a robust and value-free definition of ideology can be attained by removing the Marxist fixation with capitalism—and the critique of ideology—from the concept of ideology and seeing what is left.⁹⁴ The best way to explain what we mean by this is to illustrate the idea using a clear example of an ideology in the Marxist sense of the term. An economic system of slavery could be maintained—at least in part—by a racist ideology that asserted the natural moral and intellectual superiority of a white Caucasian over black Afro-Caribbean people. If this ideology is internalised by both sides then we could expect general apathy and passivity from the slaves, and an unproblematic, naturalised moral rationalisation of the hierarchy and inequality for their white masters, thus maintaining the political, economic and social *status quo*. The racist ideology functions to make the existing socio-economic system of slavery appear to the slaves and masters alike as the natural and unchanging order of the social world.

This simplified example encapsulates the Marxist concept of ideology as a cluster of internalised and unquestioned beliefs that functions to maintain power for the ruling class by distorting reality and perpetuating an oppressive and unjust economic system. If we suppose however, that some people from both sides reject the racist ideology and instead adopted beliefs in the fundamental equality of people regardless of race, we could imagine that they might try to undermine the racist ideology, by argument and action, and seek to abolish the economic institution of slavery. It seems quite clear that this second group is subscribing to an ideology—let us call it a non-racist liberal ideology—in exactly the same way as the first group subscribe to the racist ideology. At the beginning however, the second group possess no actual economic or political power. In fact the only thing that permits us to describe them as a group is that they possess a shared set of beliefs that allows them understand the world, and their place in it, in a different way to the racists and, to some extent, guides their political

⁹³ For an alternative view see Mathew Humphrey “(De)Contesting Ideology: The Struggle over the Meaning of the Struggle over the Meaning.”

⁹⁴ We have deliberately avoided using the phrase ‘ideology critique’ here and have instead substituted the somewhat awkward phrase ‘critique of ideology.’ Our reasons for this choice is that the former has a specific technical meaning and history associated with the Frankfurt school and critical theory. We are not here questioning the usefulness of the critique of ideology *per se*, but merely trying to disassociate it from the definition of ideology. The connection between the two, in Marx and Engels writings at least, makes it seem that the two are inseparable tasks, i.e. by defining ideology one is already engaged in uncovering and unmasking ideology.

and economic behaviour.⁹⁵ If we were to follow the Marxist paradigm of ideology as a systematic distortion of reality that maintains the unjust *status quo* then, quite counterintuitively, we could not say that this powerless and progressive second group possess an ideology. As we have said, however, it is very clear that not only do their beliefs constitute an ideology and that their liberal ideology, at the start at least, is the only thing they possess as a group.

This is what we mean then by subtracting away the Marxist notion of the critique of ideology—that insists on seeing ideology as always in the service of an oppressive ruling power and economic system—from the concept of ideology.⁹⁶ It is clear that our definition of ideology can, and should, remain neutral with regard to evaluating the particular ideology it describes. Any given ideology will have a host of effects on both its adherents and others, many of which could be described as positive or negative depending on one's perspective and position in society—but none of this need impinge on our ability to describe it as an ideology.

We will define ideology with reference to its most general functions: 'ideology serves as a map through which actors interpret the world, their place in it, and make sense of their actions.' Alvin Gouldner supports this type of definition, claiming that 'each ideology presents a map of 'what is' in society; a 'report' of how it is working, how it is failing, and also of how it could be changed. Ideology is thus a call to action—a 'command' grounded in social theory.'⁹⁷ From this definition several sets of questions become immediately apparent. How these maps are produced, reproduced, altered, accepted and discarded forms one set of problematic questions. Another set is related to questions of the way in which the maps operate, i.e. how does the actor utilise the maps, is it a conscious or unconscious mode of interpretation? The final set of questions is related to the nature of the maps—are they beliefs, opinions, interpretations or something else—and what do they pertain to—politics, cultural and social life or more? At a more general level we could also ask who can hold ideologies—

⁹⁵ The causal relationship between ideology and behaviour is certainly a complex issue. We could imagine that there will be a range of behaviours in the above example. Some people who subscribe to the non-racist liberal ideology will exert great energies—including we could imagine violent and illegal activities—to challenge and overthrow the existing system, whilst others will do nothing. Explaining the range of behaviours, and the specific reactions of specific individuals to the Islamist ideology, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁹⁶ A further point to consider is the intrinsic and interactive relationship between power and ideology, or knowledge and power to use Foucault's terminology. This can be considered as a separate problematic to the one that we have been discussing that seeks to disassociate the negative critique of ideology from the concept of ideology, and one that is beyond the direct scope of this thesis.

⁹⁷ Alvin Gouldner "False Consciousness" pp.208-209

is it possible for a single individual to create and subscribe to a unique ideology or do they operate at the level of groups—and if so what sort of groups?

The proliferation of questions points to the fact that it will not be possible to provide a comprehensive account of ideology in general and the multiple ways in which it manifests itself and operates.⁹⁸ In other words we should distinguish between two types of tasks: finding a *definition* of ideology and formulating a *theory* of ideology. Although these two things are linked—our definition will rest to some extent on our general theory of ideology and *vice versa*—it is nonetheless useful to draw the distinction. At the general level our definition should be sufficient for the first task of defining ideology. It is clear, however, that any study of a particular ideology will need to examine the way in which it functions and this will depend on our general theory of ideology.⁹⁹ This will primarily involve a close examination of the interaction between the ideology and its adherents—how the ideology shapes the actions and beliefs of the adherents; and how the adherents shape the ideology. The limited task of defining ideology meant that coining the definition was unproblematic however the much more expansive task of theorising ideology means that at best we can expand on our definition to provide a general sketch of a theory but we should not be expected to comprehensively theorise all aspects of ideology. The aim of this study is to understand and theorise a particular ideology—the Islamist ideology; it is not to advance the study of ideology in general.

We have already explored how our ideology-narrative will allow us to understand the Islamist movement and ideology from a frequently neglected but important perspective; we will now expand on our theory of ideology to see how this task can be achieved. If we return to our definition of ideology—‘a map through which actors interpret the world, their place in it, and make sense of their actions’—we can now expand on its various elements. The basic concept motivating this definition—present in the Marxist paradigm of ideology—is that ideas deeply matter. Specifically, we claim that one does not understand the social world *just as it is*, but that every act of social understanding—and action—is always already one of

⁹⁸ See Gayil Tashir’s “The Intellectual as a Political Actor? Four Models of Theory/Praxis” for an overview of the differing approaches to theorising ideology.

⁹⁹ To clarify—this thesis requires a general theory of ideology in order to study its subject—the Islamist ideology—but is not an attempt to advance the theory of ideology in general.

conscious or unconscious interpretation.¹⁰⁰ Ideologies are ubiquitous: ‘we produce, disseminate, and consume ideologies ... whether we are aware of it or not.’¹⁰¹ In other words the social world does not just ‘appear’ to social beings, but is constantly constructed and interpreted. Understanding others, and their behaviour, is not like reading numbers off a spreadsheet—we are not presented with the ‘facts’—instead we impose our own beliefs to find meaning and create order in the world. This often involves organizing and categorising events in order to create simplicity and meaning out of a complex and chaotic world. Freeden calls this process of categorisation the imposition of patterns: ‘every interpretation, each ideology, is one such instance of imposing a pattern ... on how we read ... political facts, events, occurrences, actions, on how we see images and hear voices.’¹⁰² The map that we refer to in our definition is the set of core ideas or beliefs that create the prism or filter through which the actor performs these acts of conscious or unconscious interpretation—something akin to Mannheim’s concept of *weltanschauung*.

At this point it could be objected that our definition is too wide as to be useful; if ideology just means all our beliefs then it is clearly a useless concept. We must, therefore, narrow down the scope of the concept, specifically with regard to the field of core beliefs that make up ideologies, and the ‘world’ that is interpreted by these beliefs. These two parts of the definition are connected and so can both be delimited by the same criteria; they are both concerned with the socio-political world. We use the concept ‘socio-political’ in a deliberately loose sense as the types of beliefs that ideologies are comprised, and the events that interpret, are indeed broad. The qualifier ‘socio-political’ only means that the beliefs and events are in some way connected with the social world and/or political events.¹⁰³ This means that ideologies can include religious, economic, and cultural beliefs—and many others—as long as they are connected in some way with the socio-political universe. The idea of ‘socio-political’ beliefs is related to Weber’s concept of ‘social action’—the name that Weber gave to action that ‘takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course.’¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Although it is tempting to follow the Marxist tradition that claims that ideology always operates at the unconscious level, and thus normalises the existing economic system and power structures, it seems clear that many ideological beliefs are held consciously and that acts of interpretation can be conducted deliberately by the actor. This is not to say that the actor necessarily recognises their ideological beliefs as ideological, and will often deny their ideological character if confronted by an opponent.

¹⁰¹ Michael Freeden *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* p.1

¹⁰² Michael Freeden *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* p.3

¹⁰³ The concepts of social and political are in fact so broad in this context that they probably amount to the same thing. We use both terms to correct against a narrow reading of the political field.

¹⁰⁴ Max Weber *Economy and Society* p.4

Our criterion is however narrower than Weber's inclusive concept as it suggests that the types of beliefs and actions that we are interested in are, in some broad sense, politically, as well as socially orientated.

A secondary facet of ideological maps is that they do not merely interpretively describe the world, but also act as normative guides—mapping the world as it should be—and so guide the actions of the actor. We describe this normative element as a facet as it seems likely that separating understanding of the socio-political world from evaluating it would be an impossible task. Indeed acts of understanding encompass ethical and normative judgements. To put this differently our understanding is interdependent with normative judgements—in ideological maps not only are 'ought(s)' derived from 'is(s)' but what 'is' is dependent on what 'ought.' Thus ideological maps are not only conceptual prisms for how the world is, but also what is right and wrong in it, and prescribes—in varying degrees of comprehensiveness—how it should be. Acknowledging the interlinking and interdependency of interpretation and evaluation will be important for our task of understanding the Islamist ideology.¹⁰⁵

1.3.6 Beliefs and Actions

Our focus thus far has been on the first two parts of our definition—the nature and scope of the 'map' and the 'world' that it navigates. Although we have referred to the set of 'beliefs' for the sake of consistency we must keep in mind that we are ultimately talking about ideas in a general sense—the 'beliefs' may manifest themselves as facts, intuitions, opinions, values or preferences and so on to the actor. As well as making claims about beliefs, our definition of ideology also links beliefs with actions. Michael Freeden expresses this link by claiming that 'ideologies ... map the political and social worlds ... we cannot act without making

¹⁰⁵ Admittedly this does not narrow down the scope of ideology much, but it does point us in the general direction of the types of beliefs and events with which we are concerned. Any further attempt to delimit the scope of ideology—for example by excluding certain religious beliefs on the grounds that they are private, or at least not political—would leave us open to the accusation that we are inserting our own secular ideological beliefs into our definition—a charge we certainly would want to avoid. If we have good grounds for refusing to restrict the scope of beliefs that can constitute an ideology, then we also have a valid reason to take the same position with the scope of the socio-political 'world' of which these beliefs make sense. We could, for example, delimit this 'world' by making the distinction between the public and private spheres: ideological beliefs pertain to the public world of civil society and politics, whilst beliefs that form our attitude towards, and behaviour within, the private sphere of family life are non-ideological. A brief glance towards the feminist ideology—encapsulated in the slogan 'the personal is political'—demonstrates that this sort of restriction is once again open to the charge of being an ideological construct.

sense of the worlds we inhabit.¹⁰⁶ We should not be misled, however, into thinking that ideologies are one-way processes—an idea that was present in Marx’s writings. We do not have as our model, for example, actor ‘A’ who holds the ideological beliefs (a, b, c) that cause him to interpret the socio-political world as (a₁, b₁, c₁) and act in the world (a₂, b₂, c₂). In other words actors are not unthinking automata who having internalized an ideology interpret and act in the world according to its dictates. As we have already said ideological beliefs can be reflected upon—the process of interpretation is both conscious and unconscious. Crucially, in the same vein as Gramsci’s concept of ‘thought-practice,’ ideological beliefs do not just influence actions—actions will also influence beliefs. In our model of ideology theory and practice are interdependent and interactive. Actor A, to illustrate this last point, may attend a political rally as a result of his ideological convictions (theory shaping practice) but his attendance and actions at the rally—listening to speeches, chanting slogans and so forth—will inevitably have some effect on his beliefs (practice shaping theory). Steve Bruce makes a similar statement relating the complex and subtle interplay between beliefs, ideas and action. He claims that although we cannot draw a direct causal map from beliefs to behaviour, we must take all beliefs seriously, including religious beliefs, and not assume that they act as stand-ins for more fundamental drives. He writes:

I do not want to insist that ideas or belief systems ‘cause’ behaviour in the sense that the same ideas always produce the same outcomes irrespective of circumstances. But, equally well, I see no reason to suppose religious ideas are without consequences. Beliefs are not merely fragments of justification that, like oddments of clothing in a child’s dressing-up box, can be pulled out to suit the occasion. Although the connections between particular beliefs, attitudes or values and their expression in the world are loose, connections there are.¹⁰⁷

Although we have so far examined individuals, their beliefs and actions, we should note that ideologies will always be shared and will almost always manifest themselves in part through communal practice. The notion of a single individual creating and internalizing a unique ideology—knowable only to himself—runs into similar absurdities to those present in Wittgenstein’s private language argument and so need not be considered here.¹⁰⁸ Ideologies, like languages, are essentially social in character. We should note, however, that ideologies are shared between groups of individuals—and often a shared ideology is what unites

¹⁰⁶ Michael Freeden *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* p.2

¹⁰⁷ Steve Bruce *Fundamentalism* p.109

¹⁰⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* §243

individuals into a grouping—they will have some interesting properties beyond those that operate at the level of the individual. For example, it is likely that most, if not all, individuals in an ideological movement will not possess, or subscribe to, the entire set of beliefs of the ideology as a whole. This points towards the idea that we should not consider ideologies to be static monoliths—as with Marx—but we should conceive of any given ideology as being inherently fluid, unstable, organic, plural and may contain internal contradictions.

Furthermore, ideologies are ultimately products of the various groups or movements that create and modify them, although how this complex process takes place will be different in every case and difficult to describe. Unsurprisingly, given the interdependency of theory and practice, this not only applies to ideologies but also to the movements that create, modify and embody these ideologies whose histories demonstrate a tendency to fracture, create and break alliances, evolve, dissolve, reform, regroup and so on. Gramsci's notion of 'intellectuals' will be of great utility in explaining how ideologies are shaped but this will not be the whole story. If, for example, an ideology gave weight to notions of democracy, and the movement implemented internal democratic institutions, then we might expect ideology to be shaped both by its 'intellectuals' and its ordinary 'members.' In the same way that beliefs and practices interact in complex ways, group ideologies do not necessarily operate according to a top-down model.

1.4 Definitions of Terrorism: The Difficulties in Defining Terrorism

Terrorism, like most political concepts, is difficult—and perhaps impossible—to define. 'Despite decades of academic literature on the subject,' bemoans one author, 'no commonly accepted definition has been found.'¹⁰⁹ To broach this topic we may start by asking what a good definition of terrorism would look like? Put another way, what functions should it perform? The critical test of a robust definition would be that it consistently distinguished terrorism from other types of violence: crime, standard warfare, and insurgency or guerrilla warfare. Of secondary importance is that the definition should capture our intuitive understanding of terrorism. Finally, the definition must be, as far as possible, objective, it must not discriminate between violent acts by 'them' and by 'us' when the acts are, in all other respects, identical. In our search for a definition that satisfies these three criterion we

¹⁰⁹ Thomas J. Badey "Defining International Terrorism: A Pragmatic Approach"

understand that we are not seeking to produce a legally robust definition, which would require a different type and more exacting mode of language, but an analytically useful definition, one which enables us to speak consistently and purposefully about the concept of terrorism, and its real-life manifestations.

Terrorism is always a pejorative term, so much so that it threatens to be overwhelmed by its implicit moral evaluation. The real difficulty with defining terrorism is to extricate the objective content from the normative judgement. Articulating this problem, Brian Jenkins observes: 'what is called terrorism thus seems to depend on one's point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgement; and if one party can successfully attach the label *terrorist* to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint.'¹¹⁰ We must overcome this subjective bind if we are to arrive at a workable definition that fulfils the criteria set out above. Another significant problem with defining terrorism is the tendency for imprecise definitions that inflate the concept to a point where it engulfs other forms of organized violence, such as warfare and violent crime. An analytically useful definition of terrorism will avoid the twin dangers of moral subjectivism and inflationism; it must be objective and distinctive. It should be robust enough so that we can consistently identify terrorism, but flexible enough so that new forms of terrorism can be identified as they arise.

1.4.2 Ethical Definitions of Terrorism

In a sense defining terrorism is of less importance to this study than ideology. As we discussed in the first part of this chapter 'terrorism' is not something that can be understood separately from the ideological context within which it is committed. However it is necessary to have a reasonably robust definition to make understanding the Islamist ideology, Islamist movements and the associated terrorism meaningful. There are two major problems which threaten to render the study of terrorism impossible. At one end of the spectrum there is the claim, expressed in a variety of forms, that terrorism is always a pejorative term used to castigate one's enemies as fundamentally evil and therefore beyond ordinary political dialogue or negotiation. It is usually a term applied by states to describe their non-state enemies; however it also used to depict state actors who, in their warfare activities, are portrayed as being beyond the moral pale. Rhetorically, at least, it is a mutually antagonistic

¹¹⁰ Brian Jenkins *The Study of Terrorism: Definitional Problems* p.1

term, reciprocally used to denounce one's enemies. This is summed up in the well-worn cliché, 'one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter.' The argument runs that since 'terrorism' will always be used to censure the activities and denounce the legitimacy of one's opponents, the concept is analytically redundant. According to this argument 'terrorism' can only ever be a term of propaganda and thus cannot be usefully employed as a tool for understanding a mode of violence. This approach is morally subjectivist in that it denies the ability to neutrally define terrorism and so deprives the concept of terrorism of any meaningful content.

This type of subjectivism occurs in a more subtle form when terrorism is implicitly defined by the author with reference to whether the terrorist's cause is, according to the author, a just or unjust one. If the author is sympathetic to the cause for which the protagonist acts then the violence ceases to be 'terrorism' and becomes 'resistance,' 'rebellion,' or some other more acceptable euphemism. In contrast, the deplored violent actions of the state are labelled 'terrorist,' regardless of what sort of violence is employed by either party. If we are to accept this inverted definition of terrorism, where it is used entirely pejoratively as a term of disapproval for the *cause* in which the violence is committed, then we should exclude it from our discourse on political violence.¹¹¹ Clearly, from this perspective terrorism is hopelessly subjective. To rescue the concept as an analytically useful tool we must be cautious to define terrorism entirely separately from the cause in which it is allegedly employed. If we define terrorism as x, then x committed for the most worthy, or most despicable aim, is still terrorism.

Closely connected with this subjectivist perspective is the problem of using terrorism as a moral term of disapproval. According to a deontological ethic terrorism is always a morally wrong action even if it is employed for a 'good' end. This may, or may not be the case, but to avoid the tangled webs of moral philosophy we will have to set aside any moral judgement of terrorism. This or that instance of violence that meets our definition, may be morally good, bad or neutral, but it is still terrorism. For this to be the case our definition must be, as far as possible, value-neutral and so must exclude any normative or evaluative terms and consist solely of objective criteria. More problematically, some analysts insist that 'terrorism' is inextricably a term of moral condemnation in normal usage and therefore it is inevitably

¹¹¹ A further problem with this usage of the term 'terrorism' is that the cause for which the violence is committed cannot be easily or uncontroversially discerned, and therefore its 'justness' cannot be ascertained.

always used pejoratively to denounce the violence of which we disapprove. While the first part of this claim is certainly true—‘terrorism’ is used in everyday language, by governments, the media and other bodies, to castigate certain types of violence, committed by certain types of people, for certain illicit ends—this does not mean that we must succumb to the second part of the claim. It does mean, however, that we have to be careful about how we define terrorism and how we apply this definition consistently. Our project is not to rid the language of terrorism of its contradictory meanings and applications in the real world—an impossible task—but to use it consistently, as a value-neutral concept, in order to better understand a specific type of violence.

1.4.3 Conflated Definition of Terrorism

Aside from the problems presented by subjectivism, another major threat to the concept of terrorism is presented by what we shall call conflated definitions. This occurs when the student of terrorism studies makes the definition so inclusive that it denotes all sorts of activities that have only the barest common analytical currency. The problem with conflated accounts is that they define the concept so widely that it becomes meaningless as an analytical category and thus a redundant concept. One way in which this occurs is to concentrate on the *terror* of terrorism. As any violent act, or threat of violence, contains at least the possibility of causing terror for the victim, then almost all acts of violence are in essence terrorism.¹¹² This may seem far-fetched but the problem is real and often unacknowledged. Although most analysts want to draw a distinction between ordinary violent criminal activities and terrorism, many wish to subvert the line between organised state-on-state warfare and terrorism.

Lee Griffith, writing in the pacifist tradition, claims: ‘terrorism entails an element of calculation, an effort to generate and harness the irrational whirlwind of human fear. Terrorism is the intentional effort to generate fear through violence or the threat of violence and the further effort to harness these fears in pursuit of some goal.’¹¹³ By defining the means of terrorism as the generation of fear—or terror through violence—and the ends as ‘some goal’ Griffith deliberately leaves the definition of terrorism open-ended and allows him to equate almost all forms of violence as terrorism. This leads him to pose the rhetorical

¹¹² See Virginia Held “Terrorism and War”

¹¹³ Lee Griffith *The War On Terrorism and the Terror Of God* p.6 Emphasis in original.

questions: 'Are "terrorists" ad hoc assortments of violent individuals and non-state organizations that are bent on generating fear through random, bloody attacks? Or does the phenomenon of terror have more to do with the calculations of the powerful, with the intentional sowing and inevitable reaping of whirlwinds whipped up by the powers that be?'¹¹⁴ For Griffith all violence is deplorable and drawing distinctions between illegitimate non-state violence ('terrorism') and legitimate state violence ('warfare') conceals their ethical equivalence.

As with the problem of moral relativism we may accept Griffith's contention that all violence is morally wrong and so all violence is, in some limited ethical sense, equivalent. This does not mean, however, that we cannot draw distinctions between different types of violence using ethically neutral boundaries. By equating all types of violence Griffith is held in an analytical bind of his own making; it is impossible to make meaningful or interesting claims about any type of violence if all violence is held to be essentially the same. To illustrate with an example we can see that the 1963 Great Train Robbery and the battle of the Somme cannot be equated—and analysed within a single conceptual framework—because they both involve violence, fear and terror. Any attempt to understand such disparate events using the same analytical framework will not get far. Similarly, the bombing of Baghdad in the opening nights of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 9/11 attacks, may have certain crude features in common, for example the symbolic, deliberate and instrumental use of terrifying spectacle, they may also, from certain perspectives be morally comparable, however this does not mean that both events can be understood in the same way. The differences are too significant to force the two events into the same category of violence. Rather than shoehorning all violent events into the same category, it would be more profitable to draw out and define the analytically significant differences between them. Paul Wilkinson makes a similar point:

It would surely be an act of sheer folly rather than mere hubris to attempt to explain all forms of political violence, ranging, say, from the intimidation of a professor for his alleged political views to acts of international war, in terms of a single grand scientific theory. We must bear in mind the enormous differences in scale, intensity, duration and effects, between small group violence and the large-scale collective violence of modern total war, which can engulf continents.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Lee Griffith *The War On Terrorism and the Terror Of God* xi

¹¹⁵ Paul Wilkinson *Terror and the Liberal State* p.30

In contrast to the vague definitions that pivot on the *terror* of terrorism are the comprehensive and strict definitions that rely on necessary and sufficient conditions. These are utilised primarily in legislation which require legally binding definitions to facilitate the prosecution of people committing, aiding or planning terrorist acts. They are also used by some academics and other bodies collecting data on terrorist acts that need a consistent method of deciding which acts are to be counted as terrorist and so to be included in the dataset. While there are some problems with strict definitions of terrorism we can be confident that approach is more fruitful for understanding certain acts of violence than the relativist method. Unfortunately there is not the space in this study to undertake a systematic review of existing definitions of terrorism. Instead we shall proceed to study the way in which definitions are composed.

1.4.4 Anatomy of Terrorism

Defining terrorism has turned into something of a conceptual sport for theorists of the subject and it is easy to see why this is the case. As we have already seen the concept is inherently disputable and thus malleable to the will and interests of both theorists and institutions. It is important to remind ourselves that we are not attempting to create a definitive definition of terrorism—an impossible task—but to craft a definition suitable for our particular analytical purposes of understanding the Islamist ideology and its attendant terrorism. Specifically we are searching for a definition that renders the term ethically-neutral, but allows us to productively distinguish the violence of terrorism from other modes of violence. At the same time we require a definition of terrorism that is neither so technical that it eludes our intuitive idea of terrorism, nor do we wish to be excessively guided by our already-existing prejudices. There are several different components that we can identify that make up the various definitions of terrorism. The one element that is common to all definitions is that terrorism involves violence. Some definitions also include the possibility of the threat of violence, or violence committed against inanimate objects, to count as terrorism.¹¹⁶ We shall outline the five basic elements that make up a robust definition of terrorism. It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive and there will be a certain amount of overlap in any given case.

¹¹⁶ Even this most basic element, however, might be cast into doubt by the prospect of cyber-terrorism where no physical violence occurs.

1.4.4.1 The delimitation of the type of actor engaging in violent activity

By the delimitation of the type of actor who engages in violence we refer to definitions of terrorism that define who can qualify as terrorists. For our definition of terrorism the perpetrators of terrorist activity would ordinarily be sub-state groups or individuals. This does not rule out the possibility of states sponsoring or commissioning acts of terrorism, or in exceptional circumstances directly engaging in terrorism. The reason that a state's violence would rarely be counted as terrorism is that it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish between normal warfare activity that inevitably results in the death and injury of noncombatants, and the deliberate targeting of noncombatants. Although the distinction between state and sub-state activity might not constitute an ethically significant boundary, it does represent an important analytical distinction. Put simply, the violent activities of the state and sub-state groups, in terms of organizational, financial, technological, decision-making and executive structure, are sufficiently dissimilar to require different modes of analysis. To conflate the violent activities of warfare resulting in noncombatants' deaths, and the violent activities of sub-state groups aimed at noncombatants, would be to render the concept of terrorism useless.

1.4.4.2 The immediate target

Terrorism can be defined with reference to the type of target that is attacked. We will define the immediate target as 'noncombatants,' a technical term that is similar, but not identical to 'civilians,' and 'innocents.' The immediate or direct target of the violence is crucial for a robust and consistent definition of terrorism. One reason is that for objective, analytical purposes identifying the type of target can be done fairly consistently and in most cases it is transparent to any reasonable, impartial observer. It is this distinction that will allow us to distinguish between one class of violent actions: ordinary and guerrilla warfare, and terrorism. There are however, some problems that blur this crucial distinction.

1.4.4.3 The means of terrorism

The means, mechanisms and ends of terrorism are closely intertwined, often blending and merging into one another. Discerning the content of these categories in any given instance is

at best difficult, and occasionally impossible. It is, therefore, problematic to define terrorism primarily with reference to these categories. By the 'means' of terrorism we refer to the violent techniques utilised by the perpetrators against the immediate target.¹¹⁷ A special subtype of violence is suicide bombing, which although interesting for other reasons, adds nothing important to defining terrorism. Terrorist attacks are often innovative with an obvious example being the use of civilian aeroplanes, filled with aviation fuel, as guided missiles in the 9/11 attacks. Due to this constant innovation it is necessary to leave the range of types of violence open-ended and adaptable to new techniques that may be used in future terrorist attacks.¹¹⁸

The difficulty with identifying the means of terrorism as a defining condition is that at one end of the scale it is unclear what sort of action is required to constitute an act of terrorism. In many definitions the *threat* of violence is constituted as an act of terrorism. This is intuitively appealing in some instances, for example if a group plants a bomb in a public location, and then telephones a warning to the police, allowing time to diffuse the explosive, this could plausibly be counted as an act of terrorism despite the lack of an explosion. The problem is that the range of threats ranges from an unsubstantiated message on a website through to the planting and diffusing of large bombs. At one end the threat is taken very seriously—there is a viable explosive—the consequences can be easily imagined, and so the effects (panic, terror, publicity, political capital) can flow from the action in the same way that they would have if the bomb had exploded. At the other end of the scale the threat goes unnoticed or ignored, and so the act is entirely unsuccessful; should this too be counted as terrorism? If we are to accept that *any* threat of violence, for political ends, constitutes an act of terrorism then we will be forced to include a host of acts that would clearly impinge on the right to freedom of expression. Alternatively, we could only include *credible* threats whose outcomes are

¹¹⁷ For example the use of conventional explosives, firearms and fissile weapons, and potentially more destructive non-conventional weapons such as chemical, biological and nuclear (both as a fission device and a radioactively toxic material).

¹¹⁸ One further problem with defining terrorism primarily with reference to the means is the prospect of so-called cyber-terrorism. This term encompasses a range of non-physical attacks aimed at electronic systems, including critical infrastructure systems, with an aim to disrupting their normal operation. This prospect is not so problematic when physical harm inflicted on noncombatants is directly caused by the attack. For example, a group that remotely disrupted an air-traffic control system, causing a civilian aeroplane to crash, would clearly be engaging in terrorism, even though the aeroplane and its passengers were not the direct target. Less clear is a case where a major bank's information systems are electronically infiltrated and crashed causing the loss of its customer's data. In this case harm is inflicted, both on the bank but more importantly on its customers and the wider economic system, precipitating a financial crisis. Here the harm is both indirect and non-physical and so not a case of terrorism according to our provisional definition.

similar to that of an actual violent attack, but in this case we would be classifying acts of terrorism on the basis of their success—clearly a subjective quality—and one that is impossible to quantify. Despite the intuitive appeal of including plausible threats of violence as actual instances of terrorism, it would be prudent to count them as precisely what they are—threats of terrorism—and not acts of terrorism.

1.4.4.4 The mechanisms of terrorism

By the ‘mechanisms of terrorism’ we mean the causal pathway that connects the means to the ends; in a sense this category is concerned with how terrorism ‘works.’ The candidate for the underlying mechanism of terrorism is communication, and the lexicon in which it speaks is terror. Although communication is no doubt implicit in all acts of terrorism, what is being communicated and to whom, is often unclear. At one level terrorism is an act of violent coercion levied against a populace in order to force their government into some form of political action. In other instances, however, the terrorists may merely wish to draw attention to their cause and have decided that violence against civilians is a particularly efficient and effective way of achieving this. Often this is the case with international terrorism and is expressed in Brian Jenkins dictum: ‘[t]errorists want a lot of people watching not a lot of people dead.’¹¹⁹

Usually, there are several messages, for several audiences, including the members and political constituents of the terrorist group. These are often unclear and contradictory, there may be an implicit message ‘give in to our demands and we will cease our attacks,’ but this is rarely explicitly stated and the content of the demands are almost always unclear, inconsistent, or even impossible to meet. The problem is not just one of interpretation by the multiple audiences but that the senders of the message are often confused about what their demands are, or divided on what they should be. Terrorist groups often do not have a centralised command and communication structure and so are far from monolithic structures with a consistent set of aims and a decision making body charged with attaining these ends. Furthermore, there may be a high turnover rate in the leadership structure (a natural hazard of the role) and they may often be in no position to communicate effectively even with their own group. This difficulty is augmented by terrorist attacks that are not accompanied by

¹¹⁹ Brian Jenkins cited in John Gearson “The Nature of Modern Terrorism” p.11

either a communication with a list of demands, or claims of responsibility. Of course, *something* is communicated, if only sheer terror, but it is difficult to establish whether a message has been transmitted, when the sender, and to an extent the recipients, are unknowable.¹²⁰

So far we have seen that understanding terrorism primarily as a mode of communication is problematic in the many cases when interpretations of attacks are difficult or impossible. An alternative would be to focus on the form of communication: terror. The argument goes that terrorism is distinctive, as its etymology would suggest, because it engenders terror, not just in its immediate target but also to a wider audience. This assumption is present in the definitions that described terrorism as random violence; the target, timing, place, and scale of the next attack are unknown. Terrorism generates terror because it threatens the possibility of striking anybody, anywhere, anytime with any weapon and using any method available. The terror is unknowable, cannot be quantified or qualified, and is future-oriented. According to this logic any definition of terrorism that does not make some reference to terror misses the point entirely. This is summed up in Robert Goodin's assertion: 'Terrorism... is first and foremost a *political* tactic: frightening people for political advantage.'¹²¹

Although it is counterintuitive to exclude terror from our definition it is clear that we should do so. All sorts of activities include the coercive use of fear or terror but do not constitute acts of terrorism. A mugging, for instance, often will only involve the threat of violence, in order to illicit the victim's compliance. Furthermore, in the right setting (at night, in a quiet part of town) the demand for victim's handbag, issued in a plausible way (the 'right' accentuation and language) by a convincing criminal in the appropriate dress, will result in the same desired outcome, without any explicit threat of violence being made. Presumably, many criminals rely on this implicit fear to achieve their goals without the potentially costly resort

¹²⁰ The 9/11 attacks are a famous example where responsibility has never been explicitly claimed by any group, although Osama bin Laden praised the assault in a video recording released to coincide with the American-led invasion of Afghanistan. With 9/11 it was, however, clear within a few days of the attack who the perpetrators were—from the airlines' manifests—and their connection to the al Qaeda network was quickly established. As al Qaeda had previously released statements and two infamous *fatwas* containing the outlines of a manifesto, some sense could be made of the attacks, even if the content of al Qaeda's demands are still disputed. A more telling example of the problems for the communicative model of terrorism are the anthrax attacks in the weeks after 9/11. Responsibility has never been claimed, and on going investigation has cast little light on the perpetrator(s). The timing of the letters and the targets (U.S. politicians, media offices) suggests that it may have been linked to the ideology behind 9/11, but this is a far too tenuous assumption on which to interpret these attacks as terrorism.

¹²¹ Robert Goodin *What's Wrong With Terrorism* p.1

to violence. We would not, however, benefit from labelling this instrumental use of fear as terrorism. Defenders of the terror-centric definition could point out that no-one sets about to deliberately create this atmosphere of terror, it is spontaneously generated by a host of unconnected, independent actions, and so we may retain the definition whilst rejecting this example.¹²²

1.4.4.5 The ends of terrorism

The final part of our definition concerns the ends of terrorism—the ultimate reason for engaging in terrorism. This is the clause that allows us to distinguish between terrorism and other violent activities. Many definitions make reference to political objectives and this is the obvious candidate for our definition. The main problem with delimiting the ends as political is that there are a significant range of violent activities that we would ordinarily refer to as terrorism, where the goals are not solely, or even partly, political. Instead they have another type of goal or motivation guiding their activities including, most significantly, religious ends. We cannot, however, just add religion to our list of ends that constitute terrorism. This is because it is far from clear what constitutes a religious end and how this can be distinguished from political ends. The difficulty of disentangling religious and political ends will be tackled later, for now it is worth leaving our definition open-ended. The work done by delimiting the ends of terrorism is to exclude certain types of activities, rather than describing the set to be included. So, by ‘political’ we merely mean activities where the primary goals are *not* for financial or other purely personal gains. This follows the United Kingdom’s 2006 Terrorism Act definition, referring to ‘political, religious or ideological cause[s].’ One way of conceptualising this exclusionary principle would be to borrow Hoffman’s principle, that the terrorist ‘is fundamentally an altruist,’ his actions are to be understood in terms not of personal gain (although this may follow) but for the advancement of some other cause.

We are now in a position to commit ourselves to a working definition of terrorism:

“Violence, deliberately directed against noncombatants, for political or related ends.”

¹²² A more testing example would be the activities of a mafia-type organization, where clearly fear is deliberately generated by an organized group in order to ensure the easy compliance of the society it is parasitic upon. As with the independent criminals, however, this mafia-type group is not engaging in the terror business for political reasons, but for financial gain. The leaders may engage in politics, if it is seen as advantageous to the group, but their ultimate aim is fiscal, not political, advantage.

This definition is deliberately pared back to the essentials of what is minimally required of a terrorist attack.¹²³ It would, therefore, be useful to elaborate on what is excluded from our definition. To do this we can compare our working definition with another, more comprehensive definition provided by Alex Schmid:

Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.¹²⁴

Unlike Schmid our definition makes no mention of terror, communication or propaganda. There is neither elaboration of the way targets are chosen, their various classifications (random/symbolic), nor how they are attacked. ‘Violence’ in our definition is a wide-ranging concept and no attempt is made to finesse. Likewise, the phrase ‘political or related ends’ is deliberately open-ended and serves to work as an exclusionary principle—excluding violence committed for purely personal gain—as opposed to an inclusionary principle that explicitly lists the qualifying ends. Crucially the justness, or otherwise, of the cause for which the terrorism is committed is not included; it may be a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ cause, but this will have no impact and our classification of the activity. Furthermore, there is no moral evaluation of terrorism in general contained in our definition—just because an act qualifies as terrorism

¹²³ One important point to note is that due to the narrow definition of terrorism that we are employing, it makes more sense to refer to ‘acts of terrorism’ rather than ‘terrorists,’ or ‘terrorist groups.’ This is because our definition refers to the properties of the individual action rather than the people or groups who organise and commit the attack. If we are to use the term ‘terrorist,’ we literally mean someone who commits a terrorist attack. Following on from this we can state that someone planning an act of terrorism is only a ‘terrorist’ in the sense that they are intending to commit terrorism. Strictly speaking an individual cannot be a ‘terrorist’ in the way that they could be a policeman, as policing denotes an ongoing professional activity, whilst terrorism is a specific type of act. This makes speaking of terrorists and terrorist groups problematic, in particular the political and legal identification of terrorist groups, as it suggests a permanency to terrorism that our definition does not allow. Despite this the terms are commonly used and it would make little sense to avoid using them for the sake of this consistency. Instead, we must bear in mind that strictly speaking ‘terrorism’ refers to a specific act, and further derivations such as ‘terrorist’ only refers to someone who commits this act.

¹²⁴ Alex P. Schmid cited in Joseph S. Tuman *Communicating Terror: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism* pp.13-14

according to our definition entails no moral judgement.¹²⁵ Finally, there is no reference to the type of groups legible for committing terrorist acts. The shorter definition is preferred as it captures the essence of what constitutes terrorism without the cumbersome references to the way it might work, which will inevitably vary in different instances. The load-bearing element of our definition is in the middle phrase ‘deliberately directed against noncombatants.’

We have used the concept ‘noncombatants’ to refer to the classic Just War account of legitimate and illegitimate targets in warfare. For our purposes it is not necessary to enter into this debate but merely to utilise the concept as a useful way of distinguishing between state warfare and terrorist activity. We use the term to refer to non-active participants in war-making activities. It is obvious that this distinction—and the distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate targeting of noncombatants—is a difficult one with several grey areas. However this fuzziness is necessary due to the fluid nature of the concepts that are being defined. Terrorism and warfare are dynamic phenomena that are moulded by the states, groups and individuals engaging in these activities and the technologies available to them. The different forms that terrorism can take are accounted for by the open-ended terms of our definition. Rather than supplying a strict set of necessary and sufficient conditions, we have employed a ‘family resemblance’ definition in the same way as we did when defining ideology. Different types and tactics of violence, committed for a variety of causes are collected together under the same rubric, subject to the minimal clause that they are deliberately targeted against noncombatants. As we have seen the category of noncombatants is, to a degree, open-ended in order for the definition to be flexible, so that there are no arbitrary distinctions, and yet specific enough to be analytically useful.

¹²⁵ See Charles L. Ruby “The Definition of Terrorism”

2 The Origins and Ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood

2.1 Introduction: The Origins of the Modern Islamist Ideology

The history of modern Sunni Islamist movements and the practice of terrorist attacks culminating in 9/11 can be traced back to the Egyptian Society of Muslim Brothers. Although several organizationally discrete Islamist groups came into being after the Muslims Brothers it is the ideology that was formulated by the Brothers that links these groups into a coherent Islamist movement. The Islamist ideology was shaped by the historical development and practice of these movements but conversely the ideology also shaped and guided the organizational forms and actions of the movement. As we argued in the first chapter the evolution of the Islamist ideology needs to be understood by examining the intertwining and interplay of theory and practice. In other words the Islamist ideology cannot be understood separately from the historical development and practice of the Islamist movements, and the history of the movements including their terrorist activities cannot be understood separately from the ideology.

In order to understand the creation, rise and decline of the Muslim Brotherhood and the beginnings of the modern Islamist movement we must place the Society in its historical and intellectual context. There is not, however, a single history that explains the formation of the Brothers; there is in fact a multiplicity and it is not possible within the space of this study to offer an exhaustive historical narrative. In the first part of this chapter we will therefore select the most salient histories that help us understand the distinctive features of the Brotherhood's ideology. The most general of these contextual histories is the historical social, political and economic background of Egypt from the modernisation of the country in the 19th century, through to the increasing economic, political and cultural influence of Western colonial powers from the mid-1800s to the 20th century and the British occupation from 1882. We will then examine the specific liberal conditions in Egypt at the turn of the 20th century that afforded an incubation period for the development of the ideologies of nationalism, Arabism and Islamism. The interplay between these competing ideologies both shaped the political history of Egypt in the 20th century and in doing so also fashioned their forms. The general historical context and the specific ideological context will then allow us to examine the 1919

revolution and the commencement of Egypt's liberal period that permitted the creation of non-political societies including the Muslim Brotherhood.

As discussed in the previous chapter a crucial factor in the creation and development of ideologies is the role that the intellectual plays—using Gramsci's sense of the word—both organizationally—through the leadership of movements—and intellectually—by theorising the ideology. Hasan al-Banna fulfilled both these roles and was the crucial personality in the creation and development of the Muslim Brotherhood and the early modern Islamist ideology. It will therefore be worthwhile to briefly explore al-Banna's personal biography to see how his formative experiences in rural and urban 1920s Egypt deeply affected the development of the Society and its ideology. We will then chart the formation and early growth of the Society both as a historical fact but also the mythological account constructed by al-Banna in his memoirs. In order to structure the narrative history of the Society and Islamist ideology it will be useful to utilize the series of annual conferences that demonstrate the three ideological and organizational stages the Brotherhood passed through from 1928 to the death of al-Banna. Finally, we will chart the decline and breakup of the Society as both the organization and the ideology fractured due to internal contradictions and external pressures.

The second section of the chapter will be an in-depth examination of how these historical forces gave rise to the modern Islamist movement and ideology. As in the first section with the examination of the historical socioeconomic context of the development of the Society it will be necessary to investigate the intellectual context in which the ideology developed. We shall therefore look both at the ideological background of the conservative Sunni orthodox establishment and the ideas of several influential thinkers who reacted against it in times of crisis. This genealogy of ideas will allow us to understand the intellectual resources that al-Banna drew on to forge the early modern Islamist ideology. Drawing on our study of the intellectual and historical contexts we will then examine the core concepts of al-Banna's and the Society's ideology and how these were utilized to understand the world and the Brothers' place within it. Finally, we shall examine how the ideology was used to frame and motivate the actions of the Brotherhood.

The story of the Muslim Brotherhood has, of course, already been told most notably in Richard Mitchell's seminal study *The Society of Muslim Brothers*; however as discussed in the previous chapter these histories tend to either ignore or downplay the importance of ideology in the development of the movement.¹ By placing the development of the ideology in the historical context of the development of the movement we hope to draw out our thesis that the Islamist ideology is dynamic and adaptive, rather than static and dogmatic as it appears in many other texts. This study aims to not only to provide a detailed description of the modern Islamist ideology but also to critically chart its historical evolution and in doing makes the important claim that the key feature of the ideology is its ability to adapt with new movements in new political, social and material situations.

2.1.1 Historical Background of Egypt: 1800s-1919

In the course of the nineteenth century the export trade of cotton increased rapidly to become Egypt's most valuable cash crop and source of income. Demand for cotton from Europe, and in particular Britain, rose as supplies collapsed in the wake of the American war of independence.² The burgeoning trade required investment in Egypt's infrastructure to increase output, improve internal communications and facilitate efficient exportation of cotton. The *khedive* (lord or ruler) of Egypt, Isma'il Pasha, embarked on an extravagant and expensive program of European-orientated modernization in order to meet these commercial demands. Isma'il's aims extended beyond economic reform; having been educated in Europe and lived in Paris, Isma'il intentionally turned his back on Egypt's Islamic heritage and set out to 'complete the Europeanization of Egypt in as short a time as possible.'³ These large scale projects depended on European capital investment, engineering technology and expertise of European personnel to facilitate the building of irrigation channels, railroads, canals, dams and ports.⁴ The construction of the largest of these projects commenced in 1859; ten years later the 193 kilometre Suez Canal was completed, creating a major shipping channel between the Mediterranean and Red Sea.

¹ Although Mitchell devotes a section to ideology in his book he does not examine either the interaction between the history of the Society and the ideology nor does he acknowledge the dynamism of the ideology that allowed it to survive and adapt long after the Society had effectively been destroyed.

² P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.83

³ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.95

⁴ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.76

As well as infrastructure and economic reforms, Isma'il's Europeanization program covered education, the legal system and architecture. He vastly increased the budget for education, expanding the primary and secondary school systems and founded technical colleges.⁵ One of these, Dar al-'Ulum, re-trained graduates of religious schools to teach in the new school system; Hasan al-Banna would later become one of its famous graduates. The School of Languages, later the Cairo School of Law, was also created at a similar time, and offered a francophone legal education.⁶ The elite graduates of this school were in an advantageous position to attain posts in the state's rapidly expanding civil service. Isma'il's controversial legal reforms meant the establishment of the Mixed and National Courts, which were created to standardize legal practice across the country and deal with cases that involved disputes between Egyptians and foreigners. With the creation of the Courts the jurisdiction of the traditional *shar'ia* (Islamic law) court was curtailed to family law and the administration of *waqf* (Islamic endowments). Alongside the huge infrastructure projects Isma'il aimed to emulate the grandeur of the big European capitals; he transformed the appearance of Cairo by ordering the construction of wide boulevards, large parks and tramways.

In contrast to the sweeping changes in infrastructure, commerce, education and law, Isma'il was keen to consolidate, rather than reform, Egypt's political system. Under the rule of his grandfather, Mohammed 'Ali (1805-1848), Egypt had wrested power from the sultanate of the Ottoman Empire and gained extensive autonomy and control for his dynasty.⁷ Although remaining under Ottoman suzerainty an 1841 imperial edict granted Mohammad 'Ali and his descendents hereditary governorship of Egypt.⁸ This process was completed when the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Aziz paid a state visit, and, lavishly received at great expense, pronounced the title of '*khedive*' on Isma'il.⁹ The sultan also devolved significant political rights to Egypt, including the power to raise its own army, mint its own currency and, perhaps most significantly, enter into foreign loan agreements without seeking consent from the sultan.¹⁰ Isma'il aimed to secure the dynasty by dispensing royal patronage to officials and powerful families whose interests aligned with those of the *khedive*. These influential families could be relied upon for support as their positions depended on continuing royal

⁵ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.95

⁶ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.94

⁷ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.70

⁸ F. Robert Hunter "Egypt under Muhammad 'Ali's successors" p.182

⁹ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.79

¹⁰ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.96

largesse. Isma'il introduced a consultative chamber of delegates in 1866, but this remained a symbolic gesture to lend the *khedive* the appearance of popular legitimacy as no real powers were granted to the chamber.¹¹ Essentially, Isma'il remained 'an authoritarian ruler, dispensing and withholding royal patronage at his pleasure.'¹²

The rapid pace of reform of Isma'il's rule did not just result in the influx of European capital and technology; alongside monetary investments came the inevitable arrival—with Isma'il's encouragement—of European cultural influences.¹³ With the dramatic increase in the cotton trade and the construction of the Suez Canal the geostrategic importance of Egypt grew, particularly for the British. The Canal cut the distance for shipping between India and Britain by half and by 1881 over eighty percent of the Canal traffic was British.¹⁴ The heightened strategic and commercial importance of Egypt meant the European powers, which were not just trading partners and banks, but a civilization, exerted cultural hegemony, in a myriad of ways, upon their Egyptian hosts. The bloated civil service was dominated by Europeans, especially at the upper levels, where they comprised two percent of the workforce but drew sixteen percent of the pay.¹⁵ The cultural influence of Europe was predominantly felt by the ruling elite, large landowners and cotton traders, and the graduates of the new higher education colleges—many of whom were funded by Isma'il to study in European universities. Isma'il's personal fixation on Europe was also a major catalyst for cultural penetration; he is reputed to have proclaimed: 'My country is no longer in Africa, it is now in Europe.'¹⁶

One lasting effect of these upheavals was the stratification of Egyptian society. A gap emerged between the newly educated middle-class of Europeanized-elites who filled the positions created by the expansion of the administrative duties of the state, and those with traditional, Islamic educations, or sons of families too poor to pay for an education. The rapid enlargement in the scale and profitability of the cotton industry meant that productive land became a valuable commodity and large landowners increased their holdings, either by

¹¹ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.96

¹² William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.96

¹³ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.74

¹⁴ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.97

¹⁵ Donald Malcolm Reid "The 'Urabi Revolution and British Conquest" p.220

¹⁶ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.97

purchase, seizure or royal edict.¹⁷ This came at the expense of the smallholders, who were forced to work in an exploitative relationship as labourers for their landlords. Land rights were also granted by the *khedive* to favoured officials in an effort designed to ensure that the interests of Egypt's high-ranking officials coincided with those of the ruler. A striking example of the concentration of vast landholdings to a few privileged families was Isma'il's ownership of one-fifth of cultivated land.¹⁸

Another legacy of Isma'il's spending spree was the mountain of debt it created. The revenues from the lucrative cotton trade and a reformed centralized land tax system could not keep pace with his ambitious program, extravagant tastes and the penalizing rates and terms at which the European loan agreements were set. To meet the interest payments Isma'il entered into the unsustainable practice of taking out new loans to pay the interest on existing ones. In 1875 Egypt's financial difficulties were transformed into political problems when Isma'il sold Egypt's remaining 44 percent stake in Suez Canal Company to Britain.¹⁹ A year later, despite last ditch efforts to stave off bankruptcy by increasing short-term land tax revenues Egypt effectively defaulted on its loans. The loss of control of the economy heralded Isma'il's political demise. Under pressure from his creditors a commission was established to ensure that Egypt met its debt obligations. Under this agreement two officials, from France and Britain, were sent to supervise Egyptian expenditure and the repayment of its loans, a system known as Dual Control.²⁰ When Isma'il attempted to resist this European impingement on his sovereignty, the Ottoman sultan, exercising the remaining power that the sultanate had over Egypt, deposed Isma'il and appointed his son, Muhammad Tawfiq, as *khedive*.²¹

The rule of Tawfiq represented a continuation of the trends that marked the years of his father's demise. Without his father's charisma, or access to funds, Tawfiq proved to be a weak leader, unable to hold the country together in the face of international political and economic forces outside of his sphere of influence. Economic control continued to be ceded to Egypt's European creditors which entailed the concurrent transfer of political power. The

¹⁷ F. Robert Hunter "Egypt under Muhammad 'Ali's successors" pp.192-193

¹⁸ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.97

¹⁹ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.98

²⁰ The French and British financial controllers who, although non-voting members of the Egyptian cabinet, had final say on fiscal decisions, drew up the budget, and could only be removed with consent of their home government.

²¹ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.99

transparent dependence of Egypt on Europe and the humiliating system of Dual Control fostered popular discontent amongst the long-suffering *fellahin* (peasants) as well as segments of the educated-elite and those who had relied on royal patronage for their wealth. Furthermore, elements of the army were frustrated by the dominance in the upper echelons of Turkish speaking officers and the routine discrimination against indigenous officers and their men.²² All of Tawfiq's problems resulted in a dangerously combustible political and social situation.

2.1.2 The 'Urabi Revolt

In 1879 a spark was struck that ignited the Egyptian political scene. A law was passed that effectively prevented the passage of indigenous Egyptians through the ranks of the army past the level of colonel.²³ The law was interpreted as being specifically aimed at frustrating the progress of Colonel Ahmad 'Urabi, who had garnered a popular following amongst the *fellahin*, both within and outside of the army, who identified with 'Urabi's own peasant background. The law backfired when 'Urabi and his men led a revolt against the law, and more generally in protest at the discrimination against indigenous Egyptians in the civil service and government, and European interference in Egypt.²⁴ 'Urabi's popularity stemmed from his ordinary background; he received a traditional education in al-Azhar and thus had not been exposed to European influence like so many of his peers.

Recognising the popular support that Urabi commanded Tawfiq conceded to 'Urabi's demands, rescinded the law that had initially caused offence and, in 1882, appointed 'Urabi to minister of war. 'Urabi and his supporters had three populist aims: 1) to reduce foreign influences over the country by taking back financial control; 2) to limit the power of the *khedive* by asserting constitutional restrictions on his jurisdiction; 3) to roll back Turkish-speaking control of the army, government and the higher levels of the bureaucracy. Taken together, these three aims, and the 'Urabi slogan 'Egypt for the Egyptians,' formed the beginnings of the nationalist movement that would play a vital role over the next few decades in Egyptian politics. 'Urabi's was an ideologically nationalist movement but one that easily appealed to the rhetorical symbolism and language of Islam as a unifying force against

²² Donald Malcolm Reid "The 'Urabi Revolution and British Conquest" p.220

²³ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* pp.146-147

²⁴ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.147

European influence and corrupt domestic rulers. During the early period the nationalist rhetoric blended easily with religious exhortations to *jihad* (to struggle or to strive)—in its nascent stage the ideological outlines of resistance to occupation had yet to distil into distinct movements.

2.1.3 Egypt under British Occupation

Alarmed by the prospects of an uncooperative military leadership in Egypt, and preferring a pliable *khedive*, Britain reacted to a spate of antforeigner riots in Alexandria in June 1882 by bombarding the port.²⁵ Four months later a temporary military expeditionary force was launched to quash the 'Urabi movement and secure the Suez Canal.²⁶ By September their short-term goals were achieved, and Egypt was entirely under British military control. 'Urabi, for all his success in mobilizing Egyptians against European interference ended up achieving the diametrically opposite end. The sidelined *khedive* was resurrected as a puppet figurehead, British strategic interests in Egypt were greater than ever before, and the temporary occupation did not leave for another seventy-four years.

The trends that we have identified in the lead up to the 1882 British occupation largely continued after this date. Society became increasingly stratified along two axes: in the countryside between the land-owning rich and the labouring *fellahin*; and in the cities between the European-orientated educated elite, who dominated the upper echelons of the state's bureaucracy, and the traditionally-educated poor who subsisted on the edges of the urban environment. The political, economic, legal and cultural control that European powers had exerted was consolidated by the British military occupation and was gradually formalized as the temporary invasion solidified into a permanent state of affairs. The internal affairs of Egypt and in particular its economy continued to be oriented to the advantage of British and European interests. The corollary of the British presence was an intensification of the resentment felt by various Egyptian groups to the occupation. The emerging politics of post-1882 Egypt would be dominated by the various ideological responses to the British and the competition between these factions would shape the Egyptian, Arab and Islamic socio-political landscapes to the present day.

²⁵ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.157

²⁶ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.158

The gestation period of these ideological movements was extended by several mitigating, and curiously paradoxical, factors that muddled the political picture. The invasion of the British and the termination of the 'Urabi revolt represented both a break and a continuation for Egypt. Although this was the first European military occupation since the brief Napoleonic expedition of 1798-1801, the political upshot of 1882 was a continuation of the long-standing trend of European domination, rather than a radical new reality. Tawfiq was restored as a hereditary *khedive*, albeit as a figurehead, with the real power resting in the hands of the British administrator; and the economic dependence of Egypt on its European creditors continued as before.²⁷ Egypt technically remained an Ottoman province and the existing government structure continued to exist, with each ministry overseen by a British advisor. A second factor was the surprising flourishing of Egyptian journalism after the invasion with a lively trade in newspapers and periodicals facilitating open debate and the exchange of ideas in the large cities. This outlet for peaceful protest played a role in subduing violent protests against the British but also allowed the ideologies of resistance to mature and consolidate amongst educated Egyptians.²⁸ A final factor that clouded the political scene was the ambiguous relationship between Britain and Egypt. As the British government harboured no desire for a long-term occupation of Egypt at the time of the invasion—aiming only to secure the Suez Canal and re-establish political and economic stability—it declined to define the precise terms of the occupation and the Anglo-Egyptian relationship. From 1882 to 1914 Egypt was neither a protectorate nor a colony of Britain, and was only technically a province of the Ottoman Empire. Out of this political twilight zone the three main ideological responses to imperialism gradually took shape.

The pre-war period also witnessed gradual changes by the British in response to local uprisings however the outbreak of the First World War brought to a halt all political reforms. The Ottoman Empire took the fateful decision of allying with Germany, martial law was declared in Egypt and Britain proclaimed it a protectorate—which at least had the advantage of finally clarifying the British-Egyptian relationship and formalised the dismemberment of Egypt from the Ottomans.²⁹

²⁷ From 1883 to 1907 the British administrator was Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer.

²⁸ Mohammed Abduh was one prominent voice during this period. We shall examine his contribution to the development of the Islamist ideology of resistance in detail later.

²⁹ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.242

2.1.5 Post-War Egypt

The aftermath of the First World War witnessed the painful breaking up of the defunct Ottoman Empire and the appearance of strange lines on maps to demarcate the new states.³⁰ These borders were negotiated between the Great Powers of Britain, France and Russia, who divided up realms of influence and direct control over the region.³¹ With the creation of Turkey—from its inception a stridently secular republic—the 700 year old institution of the Ottoman Islamic caliphate was abolished by Ataturk in 1924. This period of Middle East history was marked by the search for new forms of identification that would either unite societies within their European imposed borders, or resist these arbitrary lines to form communities united by religion, race or language.

In Egypt these processes had already been set in motion before the war. Egypt had effectively achieved a high degree of political, if not cultural, autonomy from the Ottoman Empire since the rule of Mohammed Ali. Unfortunately, due to the commercial importance of the cotton trade and, with the construction of the Suez Canal, its strategic position as a shipping gateway to India, it had become too important to Britain to become fully autonomous. The search for identity and a new socio-political model in Egypt was historically linked to the discourse of resistance.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the abolition of the caliphate—the defining symbol of the *umma* (community of believers) and Islamic unity—the uncompromising secularism of Ataturk, and the appearance of new names and unfamiliar borders on maps: all of these increased the urgency of the question of identity and political organization in the Middle East. These questions had to be addressed under the spectre of a reinvigorated European, Soviet, and increasingly American, contest for influence over the region and its resources; and within the confines of the racist terms of the mandate system imposed after the war. As one commentator asked: ‘Should the emerging autonomous Egyptian state have a pan-Arabist orientation and work toward something like the United Arab Republic, or should it be more strictly nationalist with secular democratic, military, dynastic, or one-party rule, or should it

³⁰ One enduringly problematic outcome of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was the creation of Palestine, which according to the agreement would be placed under international control. This would prove to be impossible when the Balfour Declaration of 1917 pledged British support for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

³¹ Russia was forced to drop claims on the territory with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

be an Islamic-based polity?’³² The search was not solely for a new politic but also for a new identity. William Cleveland asked: ‘What elements of the Arab heritage could best be used as symbols around which to rally popular resistance to the European occupation and to construct a positive image of Arab identity?’³³ We shall briefly examine the three main forms this search took that began in pre-war Egypt and continued across the Middle East stretching into the 20th century.

2.1.6 Three Ideological Responses: Classic Nationalism

Politically, the most successful post-war political modes of identification were the various forms of classic nationalism.³⁴ Nationalists emphasised a range of different cultural identifiers and encompassed several different political systems: from the secular republicanism of Ataturk to hereditary authoritarianism in Iran. The common goal shared by nationalists was the creation and promotion of national symbols around which citizens were expected to rally. National anthems were composed, postage stamps printed, and the newly designed flags hoisted into the air. Importantly the indigenous language replaced the old imperial languages of English, French and Turkish across the political, legal and bureaucratic landscape. The principle nationalist actors were the new populist parties, such as the Wafd in Egypt that needed to garner support and legitimacy for their regimes, usually in the face of European obstacles that were placed in the way of the new states gaining full autonomy. Ironically, despite their steadfast opposition to the continued presence of foreign forces, the new political classes acted to reinforce the often arbitrary borders forced on them by the mandate system. With their construction of a national mythology and a shared, imagined past they attempted to solidify arbitrary boundaries into ideologically meaningful ones.

The nationalists’ attitude towards Islam was complex and variable. In general they subscribed to the European enlightenment ideal that equated modernity with secularism and that religion was an antiquated institution belonging to the past, not the future. In particular they were naturally orientated towards the secularist principle that religious institutions should have no influence over political ones.³⁵ However, they also recognised the emotional power of Islam,

³² Albert J. Bergesen *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society* p.7

³³ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.234

³⁴ The term ‘classic nationalism’ is used to differentiate between this ideology and its competitor, Arab nationalism.

³⁵ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.301

particularly for their own populist base—the *fellahin* and devout middle classes. Accordingly, the nationalists adopted the symbols of Islam principally to avoid offending these groups and to endow their regime with the aura of religious legitimacy. At the same time, however, they made no concerted attempts to enshrine the *shar'ia* within the political, legal, social, or economic system.³⁶ This kind of compromise can be seen operating in the interwar years in Egypt where, although alcohol was banned in accordance with the *shar'ia*, no serious attempt was made to enforce the law and alcohol remained readily available. Although this balancing act left regimes open to the charge of hypocrisy and insincerity from Islamists, it also meant that politicians could quickly adopt more rigorous Islamic symbols and rhetoric when it became politically expedient to do so. The vacillation between Islam and secularism became a mark of twentieth-century nationalist politics for many regimes in the Middle East.

2.1.7 Arab Nationalism

Arab nationalists rejected what they saw as a fundamental betrayal by the classic nationalists: their capitulation to the artificial borders of the mandate system imposed by Western powers.³⁷ These divisions, they argued, were just another ploy of the imperial West to subdue, control and exploit the Arab people, essentially a reiteration of the 'divide and rule' tactic. The relevant political identifier for the Middle East was their shared Arabic language, literature, culture, heritage and history; the Arabs formed a distinct nation that could only stand up to the West if they were politically united. Where Arab Nationalists were themselves divided was on the issue of what was the exact form of political organization implied by Arabism. Some advocated a single Arab state, whilst others envisaged some kind of union of Arab states. This lack of political consensus fed popular fears that pan-Arabism was a cover for the expansionist aims of the more powerful Middle East actors looking to exert political and economic hegemony over the region.³⁸

Like the classic nationalists the Arab nationalists had an ambivalent view of Islam. At one end of the spectrum there was the acknowledgement that Islam played a formative role in the shaping of Arab culture and was still a relevant social fact in the interwar period; at the other end some Arab nationalists emphasised the diversity of religious faiths in the Middle East,

³⁶ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* pp.302-303

³⁷ A.I. Dawisha *Egypt In the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* p.129

³⁸ A.I. Dawisha *Egypt In the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* p.132

such as Egyptian Copts and Christian Syrians, and that it was a shared Arab, not religious, heritage that united them. Generally, Arab nationalists shared the view of the classic nationalists that religion, as important as it was in the past, would inevitably diminish in significance going into the future.

2.1.8 Islamism

Like the two nationalist ideologies, Islamism covered a broad spectrum of political, and even apolitical, positions.³⁹ Just as Arab and classic nationalism shared certain features, Islamism also overlapped with these and other ideologies. What distinguished Islamism was the claim that Islam should be the central point of reference for the social identity of the people in the Middle East. Whilst the Arab and classic nationalists both believed that Islam, on the whole, belonged to the past and at the peripheries of their ideologies, the proponents of Islamism placed it firmly at the centre and claimed that Islam must be the future for Muslims in the Middle East and, eventually, the global *umma*. If Islam was declining, as many thought, then it must be rediscovered, revived, and even reinvented for the twentieth century.⁴⁰ As Islamism gained legitimacy and support its ideologists developed the courage to explicitly state that this was not just a social and religious doctrine, but a political, legal and economic one.⁴¹ It is against the backdrop of political turbulence that has subsequently become known as the Egypt's liberal age that Islamism as an ideology, crystallized principally in the form of the Society of Muslim Brothers. Before we examine the formation and symbiotic development of the Society and the Islamist ideology, we shall sketch the political scenery of the interwar years.

³⁹ Islamism, in the broadest sense, means 'political Islam.' There is, however, a problem with the terminology surrounding Islamism. The generally, but not universally, accepted usage dictates, quite arbitrarily, that 'Islamist', does not refer to a person who subscribes to Islamism—in the way that a communist is a follower of communism—but denotes a violent faction of Islamism. This is unfortunate for several reasons: firstly, it makes it difficult to refer to non-violent proponents of Islamism, secondly, there is no particular reason why a follower of political Islam, would choose to follow violent or non-violent tactics, and thirdly, because of this distinction 'Islamist' is often used pejoratively, rather than descriptively. As we are concerned with understanding Islamist terrorism we shall concentrate in the Islamist ideology. For clarity we shall cleave to this accepted usage but remain vigilant not to fall into the traps presented by the cumbersome terminology.

⁴⁰ Proponents of this view, despite their radical departures from Islamic orthodoxy, would not describe Islamic revivalism in terms of reinvention. We shall explore the reasons for this in due course.

⁴¹ The evolution of Islamism, and its many mutations, is the central concern of this thesis and so we shall refrain from attempting to provide a full account too soon.

2.1.9 The 1919 Revolution, Wafd Party and Egypt's Liberal Age

In Egypt the ideology that prevailed over its competitors was classic nationalism. At the end of the First World War there were high expectations that Egypt's wartime cooperation (although essentially coerced) with the British would result in the achievement of the *en vogue* political fashions of the day: self-determination, autonomy and independence. Britain, however, would not be moved by mere fashions in political philosophy, recognising the geo-strategic importance of Egypt and the Suez Canal, and stubbornly failing to acknowledge the strength and depth of the anti-British views held by the majority of the Egyptian populace. In 1918 seven Egyptian notables approached the British high commissioner with the aim of attaining full independence.⁴² The *Wafd* (delegation) wished to represent the Egyptian people at the forthcoming Paris Peace Conference to present the case of Egyptian independence to the international community. Cursorily dismissed by the British, they took their call for independence directly to the people, touring the country to garner support, in order to demonstrate that they, not the British, represented the will of Egypt. Led by the charismatic and popular Sa'd Zaghul, the Wafd Party was formed and would dominate the tumultuous Egyptian political scene for the next three decades.

With Zaghul leading the Wafd's tour of the Egyptian countryside, agitating rural Egyptians on the popular anti-British platform, the British authorities moved to put the movement down.⁴³ In March 1919 they arrested Zaghul and several of the Wafd leaders and exiled them to Malta.⁴⁴ The physical displacement of the leaders however, only served to further incense their followers, resulting in an explosion of demonstrations and violent riots across Egypt and in particular in the large towns and cities. British attempts to forcibly quell the violence merely fuelled the movement causing it to spiral into a full-blown revolution for independence, uniting normally disparate social groups against the protectorate. The High Commissioner eventually conceded to the Wafd's original request to represent Egypt at the Paris Peace Conference, but not before over eight hundred Egyptians were killed in the course of the revolution.⁴⁵

⁴² William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.194

⁴³ M.W. Daly "The British Occupation" pp.249-250

⁴⁴ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.195

⁴⁵ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.196

After gaining this initial concession from the British authorities the Wafd was unsuccessful in attaining its goal of full independence. It took three more years of haggling and negotiations before Britain finally, and unilaterally, abolished the protectorate, declared Egypt an independent state, elevated the sultanate to kingship, and stipulated the creation of a democratic constitution within a year.⁴⁶ Treading a familiar path in imperial politics Britain was unwilling to entirely relinquish control over Egypt. At the same time as granting formal independence Britain imposed the notorious 'four reserved points' that immediately undermined Egypt's autonomy and sowed the seeds of political chaos for the interwar period. These points were: the maintenance and security of imperial communications; the right to defend Egypt against foreign aggression; the right to protect foreign interests and minorities; and the retained responsibility for the administration of Sudan.⁴⁷ The political upshot of the reserved points was the stationing of British troops in Egypt, particularly in bases near vital interests, such as the Suez Canal, and ensured the continuation of British interference in Egyptian politics.

Egypt's experience of constitutional democracy was to be a frustrating one. Several factors conspired to impede the formation of genuine democratic institutions, and thus social reform was stunted and inconsistent. We have already noted the four reserved points that made a mockery of the idea of independence, and the political landscape remained orientated towards the shaking off of the British imperial yoke. As tensions in Europe heightened in the long build up to the Second World War, Egypt remained, as ever, of geo-strategic importance, and Britain continued to interfere in her affairs—usually through the conduit of the monarchy—when their interests were threatened. The 1923 constitution also contributed to the political instability; it was framed to constrain the power of the populist Wafd by granting the monarch the prerogative to dissolve parliament, dismiss ministers, remove and instate prime ministers, and veto legislation.⁴⁸ These extensive privileges were used freely by King Fu'ad and his son Faruk, whenever it suited their interests, or occasionally when pressured by the British.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the sheer dominance of the Wafd thwarted the development of a functioning liberal democratic system. Although the Wafd were usually staunch defenders of the constitution, they were not internally democratic, and tended to act to promote the

⁴⁶ M.W. Daly "The British Occupation" p.250

⁴⁷ Selma Botman "The liberal age, 1923-1952" p.285

⁴⁸ A two-thirds majority in parliament was required to override a palace veto.

⁴⁹ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* pp.268-269

parochial interests of the land-owning elites who dominated the decision-making upper echelons of the party.

The tensions, mutual distrust and ever-shifting alliances between the palace, the Wafd and Britain resulted in the stagnation of democratic institutions, and chronic political and social instability throughout the liberal period. The typical political merry-go-round of this period is described by Selma Botman:

... a free election was held, the Wafd would be guaranteed a sweeping victory, but a conflict with the British or the palace led inevitably to the Wafd's resignation or dismissal, the dissolution of parliament, and the suspension or modification of the constitution. The Wafd would remain in opposition until a disagreement between the palace and a minority party, or a decision by the British, caused the Wafd's return to office.⁵⁰

One consequence of this political tumult, combined with a lively and, for the most part, free press, was that it proved to be a social Petri dish where experiments in civic society flourished. So long as they avoided overt interference in politics, groups and societies could operate quite freely. Non-interference was not just an imperative imposed from above, the disorder and corruption of the parliamentary system meant that many groups avoided politics as a matter of principle, and indeed a deep distrust of parliamentary democracy was inculcated during this time. It is to the inception of the most influential of these societies that we now turn.

2.2 Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949)

The founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers was Hasan al-Banna. Born in Mahmudiyah, a provincial town in north-west Egypt, he received a traditional Islamic education and learnt watch-repair from his deeply religious father, a local imam and amateur scholar. In his early years al-Banna displayed his religious fervour and flair for leadership and organization by joining and then leading the Society for Moral Behaviour, a local youth organization that encouraged Islamic practice and moral behaviour amongst its members and fellow townspeople.⁵¹ At the age of thirteen, al-Banna helped found another organization: the Hasafiyya Society of Charity. As well as inculcating correct moral behaviour, this society

⁵⁰ Selma Botman "The liberal age, 1923-1952" p.290

⁵¹ David Commins "Hasan al-Banna" p.129

also aimed to keep in check the Christian missionary work in the town. During this period al-Banna had become increasingly involved in the Hasafiyya Sufi spiritual order that emphasised members' personal devotion and the inculcation of a direct and mystical union with Allah.

Just as al-Banna was finishing school, the 1919 anti-British riots were erupting across Egypt.⁵² As he participated in these demonstrations, al-Banna witnessed the humiliating occupation of his town by British forces, which he would later resentfully recall in his memoirs as the beginnings of his ardently anti-Western views.⁵³ During this time of upheaval al-Banna enrolled in a teacher training school near his town, before transferring to the higher education college, Dar al-Ulum, in the capital. It was al-Banna's experience of 1920s Cairo, through 'the eyes of a religious villager,' that fashioned his views of the destructive effects of European politics and culture on Muslims and Islam.⁵⁴ He had already witnessed the brute force of occupation during the 1919 uprising, but cosmopolitan Cairo convinced him that the subtle, non-violent pressures of imperialism had just as pernicious an effect on the Muslim mind and soul. The contrast between the conservative traditionalism of villagers, who, even if their practice of Islam was not perfect, would never fundamentally question its tenets, with the casual atheism and hedonism of cosmopolitan city life shocked al-Banna.⁵⁵ During this period al-Banna began to see that the more serious threat of the West to Islam was the insidious way that it could silently destroy Islam from the inside, without recourse to obvious external coercion. Nobody had forced the young men of Cairo to drink alcohol, or the women to discard their traditional Islamic clothing; they did it of their own accord, and it was this passivity that caused al-Banna to despair.

Whilst studying, al-Banna wrestled with a difficult decision: whether to pursue the spiritual enlightenment of his Sufi order, or to attain a practical education and enter into a life of professional teaching.⁵⁶ Eventually, at the end of his studies, he wrote an essay comparing the roles of Sufi sheikhs and school teachers. In it he expressed his admiration for the devotion, spiritualism and ascetic life of the former, but criticised their passive withdrawal from

⁵² P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.315

⁵³ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.3

⁵⁴ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.5

⁵⁵ Abd al-Monein Said Aly and Manfred Wenner "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt"

⁵⁶ David Commins "Hasan al-Banna" p.131

society. Al-Banna deduced from his experience of Cairo that modern Muslim societies had become deeply corrupt and rendered apathetic in the face of a dominant Western culture. He wrote: ‘... my people ... under the impact of western civilization ... materialist philosophy, and *frangi* [foreign] traditions, have departed from the goals of their faith.’⁵⁷ In view of this dire situation, al-Banna viewed his role in life not just within the narrow confines of a school teacher, but as an educator in its broadest sense, to awaken within Muslims the true meaning of Islam. In a sense instead of choosing between the spirituality of Sufism and practicality of teaching, al-Banna would combine the two roles through the vehicle of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Al-Banna’s final decision to eschew the life of Sufi spiritualism in favour of the role of educator stemmed from his ideas about apathy and action. The greatest danger for Muslims was the spiritual malaise caused by Islam’s encounter with Western materialism, and the resulting apathy and inaction. Perhaps the central theme that runs through the Islamist ideology that would develop over the following decade is the intuition sensed by al-Banna and others that above all else action, often expressed as *jihad*, was urgently needed. The form that this action should take was—and continues to be—open to a wide spectrum of interpretation but the need and urgency of the imperative is always present in the Islamist ideology. The corresponding position to this idea was the belief that the ‘Mosque alone did not suffice.’⁵⁸ Before leaving Cairo for his first teaching post in Ismailia al-Banna acted on these convictions. In what can be retrospectively seen as the embryo of the Muslim Brotherhood al-Banna organised a group of al-Azhar students and trained them in ‘preaching and guidance.’⁵⁹ Crucially, he instructed them not to just preach in the traditional centres of Islam, the mosques, but also in coffee houses and other public places. They were to take al-Banna’s message directly to the people, thus bypassing the sluggish and conservative hierarchy of *ulema* (religious leaders). Once al-Banna moved to Ismailia he was to do the same and out of this the Society of Muslim Brothers was born.

2.2.1 Formation of the Society of Muslim Brothers

⁵⁷ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.6

⁵⁸ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.5

⁵⁹ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.5

Al-Banna's experience of Ismailia served to reinforce his awareness of the British occupation and the resultant cultural, economic and political domination of the foreigners. Located in the heart of the Suez Canal Zone a large section of the joint British and French Suez Canal Company was based in the town and was the main source of employment. The British also had a sizeable military base on the outskirts and thus there was a large and dominant foreign presence. Furthermore, al-Banna complained of the monopolistic control of the local utilities by foreign companies and the very obvious disparities, in wealth, stature and living standards between the indigenous Egyptians and the Westerners.⁶⁰ All of this served to reinforce al-Banna's ideas of the corrosive and pervasive effects of imperialism on Egyptians and Islam, as well as providing a receptive audience that would readily identify with them.

The importance that al-Banna attached to the power of education dictated the shape of the Society in its formative years. Soon after moving to Ismailia al-Banna began teaching Arabic at a local primary school. He also started an adult learning class for the children's parents in the evening and despite the demands of his position as the leader of the Brotherhood he did not retire from his teaching position until 1946. Al-Banna was not, however, content with this form of passive teaching. He viewed the role of the educator as active; he would not merely offer instruction to those that came to him—in common with his students in Cairo—he decided that he would have to go to the people. To this end al-Banna began to lecture at the mosques, local dignitaries' houses and coffee shops in and around the Ismailia area.⁶¹ The themes of his preaching were those that he had developed in Cairo and throughout his life: the subjugation of Egyptians to foreign forces and the urgent necessity for a wholesale return to an authentic Islam.

As al-Banna gained a reputation and a small following in Ismailia it became clear that to expand his project some form of organizational structure would need to be implemented and it was to fulfil this need that the Society was created.⁶² The actual historical founding of the Society is unclear and was later disputed by disgruntled former members; however, al-Banna's version of events, recounted in his memoirs, remains an important apocryphal account of the Society's establishment. The founding myth encapsulates and dramatises some of the themes of the nascent ideology. According to al-Banna's memoirs, in early 1928, six

⁶⁰ David Commins "Hasan al-Banna" p.132

⁶¹ Ziad Munson "Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood"

⁶² Ziad Munson "Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood"

workers employed by the British labour force approached him detailing their, and by implication, Egyptian society's problems. After listening to him preaching they replied:

We have heard and we have become aware and we have been affected. We know not the practical way to reach the glory of Islam and to serve the welfare of Muslims. We are weary of this life of humiliation and restriction. Lo, we see that the Arabs and the Muslims have no status and no dignity. They are not more than mere hirelings belonging to the foreigners. We possess nothing but this blood ... and these souls ... and these few coins ... We are unable to perceive the road to action as you perceive it, or to know the path to the service of the fatherland, the religion, and the nation [umma] as you know it. All that we desire now is to present you with all we possess, to be acquitted by God of the responsibility, and for you to be responsible before Him for us and for what we must do. If a group contracts with God sincerely that it live for His religion and die in His service, seeking only His satisfaction, then its worthiness will assure its success however small its numbers or weak its means.⁶³

Moved by this appeal al-Banna duly accepted their request and took upon himself the burden of leadership. The group and al-Banna then swore an oath to God 'to be soldiers for the call of Islam,' before al-Banna pronounced the group's name: *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (Society of Muslim Brothers).⁶⁴

2.2.2 Early Development of the Society

Al-Banna's faith in the reforming power of education was reflected in the early development of the Society. As we have already noted al-Banna's conception of education was quite broad and segued into his belief in practical action. He expressed the overarching goal of the Society within revivalist and educational terms: 'to raise a new generation of Muslims who will understand Islam correctly.'⁶⁵ He wanted the Brotherhood, and other Islamic societies, to fill the gap left between the theological learning of al-Azhar and the spiritualism of Sufism. This chasm could only be crossed by practical action, or, to describe it another way, the application of Islam to all aspects of life. This meant turning from a theoretical orientation towards Islam to a practical, active attitude. Al-Banna did not want to overthrow the existing orders of Islam, but to complete them:

⁶³ Hasan a- Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.8

⁶⁴ Hasan al-Banna cited in Brynjar Lia *The Society of Muslim Brothers In Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* p.36

⁶⁵ Hasan al-Banna cited in Brynjar Lia *The Society of Muslim Brothers In Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* p.37

If ... the scientific power [or scholarship] of al-Azhar had been combined with the spiritual power of the Sufi orders and the practical power of the Islamic societies, then a unique and exceptional nation [umma] would have come into existence. This nation would have been a guide, not guided, a leader, not led.⁶⁶

In keeping with the idea of grassroots social reform and education one of the initial charitable actions of the formative branch was the building of a mosque and two Islamic primary schools—one for boys and one for girls.⁶⁷ The group also bought a house to use as its headquarters and raised money to fund these projects including, ironically, five hundred Egyptian pounds from the Suez Canal Company. For the first four years the Society expanded into several branches around Ismailia as al-Banna toured the countryside and preached the message of the Brotherhood. Branches were founded along the same lines as in Ismailia; a meeting place was created and then some form of charitable project undertaken, usually with an educational purpose. Although the branches had some autonomy, al-Banna was keen to exert a centralized control over the growing Society.⁶⁸ One way in which this was achieved was by obligating new members to swear a *bay'a* (oath of allegiance) to al-Banna, a practice instituted from the very beginning of the Society.⁶⁹

During the early stage of development the Society maintained an apolitical stance.⁷⁰ Al-Banna had no wish to become embroiled with national or local politics, and was careful not to offend traditional religious practice of the villages into which the Society expanded.⁷¹ He was equally careful to avoid clashes with local and national politicians and bureaucrats, and so would temper the group's anti-British rhetoric and its critique of Wafdist nationalism in its publications. Finally, al-Banna, recognising the tripartite form of Egyptian politics, would not publicly declare or withhold support for the palace. Instead of involving itself with dangerous disputations, the Brotherhood's objective for its early stage was to grow and develop a dense network of members throughout Egypt. This was to be achieved by improving the Islamic

⁶⁶ Hasan al-Banna cited in Brynjar Lia *The Society of Muslim Brothers In Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* p.38

⁶⁷ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.9

⁶⁸ For a detailed description of the Society's organization see Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* pp.163-183

⁶⁹ Brynjar Lia *The Society of Muslim Brothers In Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* p.37

⁷⁰ Ziad Munson "Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood"

⁷¹ After one early incident where al-Banna became embroiled in a dispute concerning the allegorical, rather than literal, meaning of Mohammad's midnight journey, he was meticulous in demurring to Islamic scholars on points of theological minutiae.

education and practice of its members who were to internalise the Muslim Brotherhood ideals and act as cadres for an Islamic revival of Egyptian society.

2.2.3 Return to Cairo and the Conferences

After four years in Ismailia al-Banna returned to Cairo. Until this point the Brotherhood had grown around Ismailia and the Suez Canal Zone. With the move to the capital and the opening of the first Cairo branch—which subsequently became the group’s headquarters—the Brotherhood transformed from a local to a national movement. With this shift in their geographical spread came a gradual change of emphasis in the Brother’s goals. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this study to describe in detail the Society’s history, it is worth recounting the stages through which it progressed. Several large annual conferences were held following the move to Cairo and by tracking the issues discussed and the agendas set, we can chart the changes in the Brotherhood’s aims, and the means by which these were to be achieved, as well as the evolving self-image of the Society. Although the conferences offer an idealized and self-constructed history they are useful for our purpose of understanding their intellectual and ideological progression.

2.2.4 First Stage: Education

Hasan al-Banna understood that the Brothers would have to pass through three broad stages to achieve their ultimate goal of a total reformation of Muslim societies and their reorientation towards a true Islam. As we have seen the first stage was largely influenced by al-Banna’s faith in pedagogy and the belief that an Islamic revival at the level of the individual would result in a spiritual and intellectual awakening. Utilizing a classic Marxist model of ideology as a smokescreen al-Banna claimed that the dire situation of Egyptian Muslims was potentially known by the people; however the seductive apathy induced by Western materialist influences had rendered them insensible to recognising their predicament. The Brotherhood, as originally conceived by al-Banna would undertake *da’wa* (call to Islam) to wake up Egyptian society from its slumber by training a cadre of dedicated activists. They would spread throughout the country, and eventually the rest of the *umma*, bypassing the

traditional nodes of Islam and speak directly to the people.⁷² This was described in the first and second conference as the initial stage of 'propaganda, communication, and information.'⁷³

In addition to the quasi-traditional model of *da'wa* al-Banna was keen to embrace modern tools of communication in order to transform the society into a mass movement and disseminate its message.⁷⁴ Although antagonistic toward Western materialism he was pragmatic when it came to adopting its technologies for the Society's ends; an attitude evinced by their use of the tools of mass communication.⁷⁵ Soon after moving to Cairo the Society created a small company in order to purchase a printing press. This served the purpose of publishing the Brotherhood journals, magazines and newspapers. It was also used to distribute the 'messages' written by al-Banna that formed the basis of the group's ideology and kept members informed of the Society's official views. The Brotherhood press was thus an important instrument of propaganda and publicity to attract further support, as well as a communicative tool to maintain central control over the Brothers and maintain intra-group morale.

2.2.5 Second Stage: Organization

The third, fourth and fifth conferences, held between 1935 and 1939, were themed around the second stage of development: 'formation, selection, and preparation.'⁷⁶ Throughout this period the Brotherhood grew rapidly and had branches in all major Egyptian urban centres and throughout the countryside. By 1938 Richard Mitchell estimates that there were 300 active branches; by 1949 this had risen to approximately 2000.⁷⁷ The estimated number of active members, between 300,000 and 600,000 out of a population of twenty million meant that the Brotherhood was the largest organized movement in the Egypt.⁷⁸ Its members

⁷² Sana Abed-Kotob "The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt"

⁷³ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.13

⁷⁴ Selma Botman "The liberal age, 1923-1952" p.297

⁷⁵ In this sense the Brotherhood was a thoroughly modern organization, unlike similar *salafi* movements it was willing to look both forward and backward looking and saw no contradiction in embracing Western science and technology whilst idealizing the period of the four 'rightly-guided' caliphs (Mohammed's immediate successors), as the model of an Islamic renaissance. As we shall see this became a permanent feature of future Islamist movements.

⁷⁶ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.14

⁷⁷ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.328

⁷⁸ Ziad Munson "Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood"

represented virtually the entire spectrum of the Muslim population: the poor *fellah*, the middle-class *effendi*, *bazaar* merchants, army personnel, members of the legal and medical professions, students in Al-Azhar and the lay universities, and crucially, in the civil service. The question that exercised the Society during this period was, therefore, how to organize and utilize this base of potential power. Essentially this problem was one of organization and specialization, and the Brotherhood experimented with several structures to consolidate the membership.

Since the founding of the Society al-Banna took a holistic approach to the problems that he saw facing Egypt. Initially for the individual, followed later at a societal level, an Islamic revival did not just mean a spiritual awakening, an intellectual reorientation and an ethical transformation, but also a physical renaissance. Al-Banna did not view these as discrete components, but a set of interlinking characteristics that needed to be developed symbiotically to ensure the rejuvenation of Muslims, the *umma* and Islam itself. When the first few branches were founded physical training meant occasional outdoor expeditions by members as well as general exhortations to care for one's health and hygiene. These were intended to not only improve physical fitness but also encourage intergroup bonding, internal loyalty and mutual trust within the Brotherhood. In the course of the second stage these informal activities became regularised into a programme of exercise and outdoor pursuits resulting in the formation of the Rovers and the Battalions.

The Rovers were similar to the British Scouting movement and became a way to recruit young Egyptians into the Society. They were also a way by which the Brothers institutionalized their power into a physical force; on occasion the Rovers were called upon to provide 'security' for important gatherings and meetings. Shortly after the official formation of the Rovers, another subsection of the Brothers—the Battalions—were created. The formation of the Battalions, however, preceded any clear idea of what exact purpose they would serve, and this lack of direction led to their stagnation. Initially each Battalion was composed of forty selected Brothers who were to meet once a week for an intense night-vigil, prayers and meditation. Al-Banna would personally come to these meetings to deliver a lecture and lead the prayers.⁷⁹ However, over the course of a year the attendance waned and

⁷⁹ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.196

not all the meetings took place, almost certainly due to a lack of clarity amongst the members and leadership of their function.

2.2.6 Third Stage: Action

Marking the tenth anniversary of the Society's foundation the fifth conference was symbolically devoted to the third and final stage: 'execution ... the active stage out of which the fruits of the mission of the Muslim Brotherhood will appear.'⁸⁰ After the first two stages of growth and preparation the zenith of the Brotherhood would be action, an idea encapsulated by al-Banna's climatic conference speech:

At the time that there will be ready, Oh ye Muslim Brothers, three hundred battalions, each one equipped spiritually with faith and belief, intellectually with science and learning, and physically with training and athletics, at that time you can demand of me to plunge with you through the turbulent oceans and to rend the skies with you and to conquer with you every obstinate tyrant. God willing, I will do it.⁸¹

Beyond the stirring rhetoric, however, the exact form that this action would take was always unclear; the internal politics of Egypt by this point was entirely dominated by the Second World War, and the Brotherhood's scope for action was curtailed by the declaration of martial law under the terms of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty. Al-Banna's deep distrust of the political system and fear of committing to a premature battle meant that the time for action was always set in an indeterminable future.

Despite this reticence we can identify three tentative developments in the period following the fifth conference, their purpose being to at least demonstrate that the Brothers were on the path to the final, 'active' stage. The first was an official declaration, in reality an acknowledgement, that the Brotherhood was a political organization. Despite his distrust of the machinations of the political system Islam was, for al-Banna, both 'religion and state.'⁸² As we shall soon examine in detail, the internal logic of the Brotherhood's ideology dictated that the Society was necessarily a deeply political organization. This same logic also meant

⁸⁰ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.15

⁸¹ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.15

⁸² Sana Abed-Kotob "The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt"

that whilst defining the Brotherhood as a 'political organization' this was understood in a more holistic sense than a mere 'political party.' In 1943 al-Banna explained this distinction in a letter widely distributed to members:

My Brothers: you are not a benevolent society, nor a political party, nor a local organization having limited purpose. ... When asked what it is for which you call, reply that it is Islam ... the religion that contains within it government, and has one ... of its obligations freedom. If you are told that you are political, answer that Islam admits no such distinction.⁸³

This quote demonstrates al-Banna's continuing suspicion, and distaste, for the political system; a Brother will only admit to involvement in politics as a negative response to an accusation from his imagined interlocutor. This reluctant position informed the second response to the fifth conference: al-Banna's aborted attempt in 1942 to stand for parliament in Ismailia district. Up to this point it had been consistent to be both a member of a nationalist political party, for example the Wafd, and a Muslim Brother, however the decision to directly enter into parliamentary politics threatened this relationship. In the end, al-Banna's distrust of party politics prevailed. Shortly after announcing his candidature he was approached by the leader of the Wafd, Nahhas Pasha, and asked to withdraw from the elections. Al-Banna did so in return for greater freedom for the Society—whose activities had been curtailed since the outbreak of the war—and a commitment for the Wafd to restrict alcohol sales and prostitution.⁸⁴

The third course of action undertaken by the Society as a result of the fifth conference was their most direct in the pre-war period and the closest to the theme of 'execution.' Clashes between Arabs, Zionists and the British in Palestine had resulted in the Arab strike of 1936-39. Al-Banna took this opportunity to agitate for the Palestinian cause, supporting the strike and raising funds to be sent to Palestine. This cause easily fell within the Brothers' ideological remit, involving their archetypal imperial foe, the British, Zionists—who were seen as an extension of Western imperial forces—and Arab Muslims. The latter were of concern as the Brothers made no ideological distinction between Egyptian and non-Egyptian Muslims, and by this point several branches of the Brotherhood had been created in

⁸³ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.30

⁸⁴ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.27

surrounding Arab states.⁸⁵ Although these were distinct, autonomous organizations, only borrowing the name, ideology and structure of the Egyptian Society, they demonstrated the theoretical transnational pan-Islamism of the Brothers.

2.2.7 Breakaway Groups

Despite the new strategies adopted after the fifth conference some of the younger Brothers were left frustrated. The disappointing flirtation with the political system and the limited response to the situation in Palestine was insufficient to convince them that the final fulfilment of the Brotherhood's mission was imminent. In late 1939 a small but significant number of members broke away to form a rebel group—the Society of Our Master Mohammed's Youth. For this group the mission of the Muslim Brotherhood was both simple, and had been betrayed by a hesitant leadership that had become enmeshed in the political system they rhetorically rejected. The original goal of the Brotherhood, as understood by this group, was the total Islamic reformation of Egyptian society, which they interpreted as a 'moral salvation.'⁸⁶ Where the Brotherhood and its offshoot differed most markedly however, was the means by which this end should be achieved. Whilst al-Banna warned against 'hasty' and 'unprepared' action, the young members of the new society did not hold these reservations. If fellow Egyptians did not reform when they heard the call to Islam then it was their duty to use 'force of hand.'⁸⁷ The breakaway group did not manage to attract enough support to threaten the Brothers but it did set a pattern for future Islamist movements. The stagnation of the Brotherhood in terms of tangible actions inevitably led to the alienation of some of its members. Similarly with later movements, the imperative to visible action, in order to maintain the internal momentum of the group, often outweighs the utility of those acts; put another way, the continued demonstration of the ability to pursue means becomes more important than the achievement of goals. Like the proverbial shark the ideological movement must keep moving to ensure its survival—the theory can only be sustained by the perception of continual practice.

⁸⁵ Abd al-Monein Said Aly and Manfred Wenner "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt"

⁸⁶ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.18

⁸⁷ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.18

The fifth conference also provided a platform for the leadership to reflect on the previous wave of structural reformation and its failures, and to devise and implement new reforms. The failure of the Battalion system—although a disappointment for al-Banna—did force an important rethink of the best way to organize the Society. The second reorganization began in the early 1940s and in 1943 the most important organizational unit of the Brotherhood was created: the ‘Family’ system. Families of Brothers were limited to five members, and were primarily a means of providing a tightly knit structure of self-reinforcing indoctrination.⁸⁸ The Family would meet weekly at a member’s home for prayers and discussions on Islamic topics. The small size of each cell meant that the actions of each Brother was under close scrutiny by his Family members and so effectively coerced each member into greater devotion to the Brotherhood. It also allowed Families a degree of autonomy in their actions without fear of infiltration by outside forces, and in theory if one cell was disrupted the rest would not fail.⁸⁹ Al-Banna, having not abandoned the alluring rhetoric of Battalions, also devised a system that could be scaled up in numbers. In theory, four ‘Families’ would form a ‘Clan,’ five ‘Clans’ in a ‘Group’ and finally a ‘Battalion’ would be composed of five Groups; leading to a total of five hundred Brothers.⁹⁰

The last organizational form that was created by the Society was the shadowy and notorious ‘Secret Apparatus.’⁹¹ Known internally as the ‘Special Section’ it came into being around 1942. Information about the Apparatus is patchy due to its clandestine nature and subsequent government propaganda spread to discredit the Society and exaggerate its activities. It seems that al-Banna’s intention was that the Apparatus would undertake covert and illegal operations against the government to facilitate the ‘revolution’ and the founding of an Islamic state. In reality these grandiose ambitions were scaled back so that the Apparatus became a defensive unit against a hostile government attempting to isolate and dismantle the increasingly popular Society.

As with the Battalions the Apparatus’ success was limited because of the lack of clarity with which its objectives were formulated. The absence of a concrete guiding strategy meant that the group’s actions were sporadic and lacked internal coherence. This, combined with their

⁸⁸ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* pp.206-207

⁸⁹ Although this resembles the cellular system of some modern terrorist organizations the Muslim Brotherhood remained a highly centralized organization until its dissolution.

⁹⁰ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.197

⁹¹ Youssef Choueiri *Islamic Fundamentalism* p.41

implicit autonomy, resulted in a series of attacks that belied the true power of the Brotherhood—the attempt on the life of Nahhas Pasha—the Egyptian Prime Minister for most of the War—followed by the assassination of the wartime minister of finance Amin ‘Uthman Pasha in 1946.⁹²

2.2.8 The Decline of the Society of Muslim Brothers

As the confidence of the Secret Apparatus grew so did the scale, scope and audacity of their violence directed against British and Egyptian targets. The guiding principle behind this growing violence was the equation, in the minds of many Egyptians, of British imperialism and Zionism with the unpopular post-War Sa’dist government. Judges, politicians, policemen and other officials accused of collaborating with Britain were attacked, as were theatres and cinemas in Cairo that symbolized Western cultural imperialism.⁹³ Jewish businesses, homes and other ‘foreign’ interests were also bombed as the Palestinian war escalated.⁹⁴ With this surge in violence, the members of the Apparatus and other Brothers acted with an unprecedented level of autonomy. The internal momentum that had gathered with the rapid growth of the Brotherhood and the inexorable evolution of its ideology—from propaganda, to preparation and finally action—had overtaken the leadership who ceased to be able to control their constituents. Despite al-Banna’s efforts to restrain the membership and urge restraint, the Society was now on a direct collision course with the entrenched political powers of Egypt: the Wafd, the Sa’dist government, the Palace and Britain.

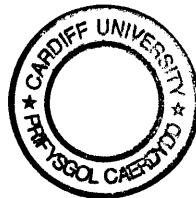
Concurrent with this period was the creation of the state of Israel and the simultaneous war of independence as Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon and Syria rejected the UN ruling of partition and declared war on the new state.⁹⁵ We have already noted the Brothers’ involvement in supporting resistance to Zionism by participating in the Arab strike at the end of the 1930s, but with the partition decision in 1947 al-Banna felt confident enough to openly declare *jihad* and mobilize a Battalion to fight in Palestine. A year later the Battalion was sent to the border a few weeks prior to the official commencement of war. Although the details of the Society’s involvement in the conflict are sketchy it seems that the Battalion did not play a

⁹² Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* pp.62-63

⁹³ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* pp.360-361

⁹⁴ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.366

⁹⁵ P.J. Vatikiotis *The Modern History of Egypt* p.365



major role in hostilities, but employed guerrilla tactics and hit-and-run attacks on Zionist settlements. As the fighting recommenced after the breakdown of a truce in October 1948 events reached a climax in Egypt; the Society had grown too powerful and the challenge to Egyptian sovereignty was too obvious for the government to ignore. In the following month, believing that a full-scale revolution was imminent, the Society of Muslim Brothers was declared illegal, its fighters in Palestine were rounded up into camps to be deported to Cairo, the Society's assets were seized and the process of their dismantlement commenced.

In retrospect the organizational changes and new strategic directions taken after the fifth conference marked the apogee of the Brotherhood's power and the beginning of its decline. The Family system and the Secret Apparatus were both designed to allow the Society to continue to operate autonomously and covertly when the leadership and its centralized institutions were repressed and eventually destroyed. Al-Banna's short-lived attempt to enter mainstream parliamentary politics foundered on his personal lack of commitment to the political process, the popular power of the Wafd, the ruthlessness of the Sa'adist regime and the Palace, and ultimately British control over domestic politics and internal security. Furthermore, the Society increasingly faced serious centrifugal pressures from developing schisms between Brothers over the direction the Society should be taking and the means by which they should be pursued. The most visible of these was the secession of the militant Mohammed's Youth but there were also disputes amongst the leadership during this period.

The final precipitating event that led to the intensive persecution of the Society and its members was the assassination of the Prime Minister Mahmud al-Nuqrashi in late December 1948—who a few months previously had announced the decree for the dissolution of the Brotherhood—by a young student member of the Society. At al-Nuqrashi's funeral the chant of 'death to Hasan al-Banna' was heard and in February of the following year this call was answered. As he stepped into a taxi al-Banna was shot and died shortly after in hospital. The charismatic personal authority of al-Banna that had managed to just hold the Society together until his assassination—widely believed to have been carried out by the secret police with government sanction—was obliterated.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ David Commins "Hasan al-Banna" p.133

Although several factors conspired in the decline of the Society the most critical came from the tripartite political establishment.⁹⁷ Throughout the Second World War and during the post-war period successive governments attempted to control the powerful Brotherhood either by co-option or suppression. At the heart of the problem lay the paradox that the Society had become too strong for the nationalists and the British to ignore, but too weak to stand up to these dominant forces. Tactical alliances between the nationalist Wafd and the Islamist Brothers were inherently unstable as they undermined the Society's ideology and discredited the commitment of the leadership to the Islamist project. The alternative however, was worse; despite their attempts to decentralize, the Society was still heavily reliant on their printing presses to disseminate propaganda and communicate with its members. The loss of their leader, who had barely managed to hold the Society together, compounded these problems. When the Society was declared illegal in 1948 and its property seized, the organization of the Brothers at a national level rapidly disintegrated.

The events of the years following the Society's initial dismantlement to the 1952 revolution are too complex to recount in full here but a brief account will suffice for our purposes. In the political and social turbulence of the pre-revolutionary years the Society, under the new leadership of a former judge, Hasan Isma'il al-Hudaybi, the Brothers found themselves buffeted from illegality to legality and back again whilst being variously co-opted or suppressed by the stream of governments during this period. Lacking al-Banna's personal authority or legitimacy, al-Hudaybi found it even more difficult to hold the socially and ideologically divided Society together. Many Brothers were arrested and interned in desert prisons where they were able to maintain informal organizational structures but were prevented from communicating with the wider membership. In the years that followed escalating violence in Egypt and the breakdown of law culminated in the 1952 revolution led by Anwar al-Sadat. Although the revolutionary conspiracy involved several groups it is clear that Secret Apparatus in particular, and the Muslim Brothers in general, were important protagonists.

In 1952 a group of army officers led by Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdul Nasser overthrew King Farouk and established control in a *coup d'état*.⁹⁸ Initially the Muslim

⁹⁷ For a thorough account of the Society's convoluted decline see Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* pp.35-151

⁹⁸ Michael Crowder *The Cambridge History of Africa: From c. 1940 to c. 1975* p.509

Brotherhood was used to garner popular support for the revolutionary council and undermine the prospects of an Islamist counterrevolution. This relationship of convenience quickly fell apart due to the radical divergence of the ideologies of the republican officers and the Islamist Brothers. Two years later the Society was once again outlawed and shortly after, following a familiar pattern, an unsuccessful assassination attempt was made as Nasser held a nationalist rally. The fate of the Brotherhood as an illegal organization had now been sealed. The response from Nasser was swift, in December 1954 six Brothers were hanged, thousands were imprisoned and 'the organization had been efficiently crushed.'⁹⁹

2.3 The Historical-Ideological Context of the Muslim Brotherhood

As discussed in the previous chapter there are two interconnected principle components to any ideology: the descriptive element—how the ideology constructs the world—and the prescriptive element that imagines how the world ought to be. As we saw in the previous section due to the historical circumstances of the Muslim Brotherhood as a large organization in a hostile political environment and al-Banna's risk-aversion the scope for action was tempered by fears of government reprisals. This in part explains why the ideology developed lopsided, with the descriptive critique of the world more fully developed than the utopian vision for a new world. It is therefore appropriate that we should devote more space to explicating and understanding how the Brothers viewed the world, and the key theological and ideological ideas that were employed, and less space on their plan for action on how to change the world. When examining the ideology it is important to remind ourselves that ideology is neither a by-product of the movement nor do the organizational form and actions of the movement merely flow from the ideology. Instead these two elements are intertwined and interdependent and therefore it will be necessary to refer back to the history of the Society in order to understand the ideology and *vice versa*.

Having examined the origins, rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in its historical economic, social and political context we must now turn to an in-depth examination of the intellectual context in which the ideology was formed and shaped. The formation of the Society represents the first Islamist mass movement and the framework of the modern Islamist ideology. The intellectual origins of the Islamist ideology however stretch much

⁹⁹ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.151

further back than the Muslim Brotherhood. We will therefore explore these historical and intellectual roots in order to better understand the evolution of the modern Islamist ideology. The intellectuals we will examine were reacting against two broad historical currents. The first was the predominance of a conservative Sunni Islam that preferred political and social stability to a rigorously enforced Islamic theology. The second theme was the sense of crisis created by the onset of dominant foreign forces. The failure of the mainstream conservative *ulema* to react to the challenges posed by these encounters formed the basis of the alternative radical response.

With the ascendancy of European imperial powers, marked by their economic dominance, superior war and civil technologies, and eventual political, diplomatic and bureaucratic control over Ottoman internal and foreign affairs, Muslim thinkers and political activists have had to confront the question of the apparent superiority of the Christian West over Islam and modernity over tradition.¹⁰⁰ How had the *infidels* (non-believers) managed to subdue and dominate the divinely ordained community of Muslims? One popular response to this existential crisis was that the revelations of the Prophet Mohammed remained valid, but that Muslims in general, and political leaders in particular, had abandoned the 'true' path of Islam, either entirely or by following a corrupt version of Islam tainted and ruined by the accumulation of man-made *bida'* (innovations). By embracing Western codes of morality and replacing the divine *shar'ia* with secular, man-made laws, and by adopting foreign political institutions and alien economic practices, Muslims had conspired with the West in their downfall. In short Islam was not to blame for the decline of the Muslim *umma*, and only a return to Islam could ensure the survival and rejuvenation of the *umma*. This line of reasoning was given expression and popularised by four important thinkers—ibn Taymiyya, Muhammad al-Wahhab, Sayyid al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh—all of whom had an important intellectual influence on the formation of al-Banna's and the Brotherhood's ideology. Before turning to these thinkers we will first briefly examine the mainstream conservative Sunni establishment that was the background source of their frustrations.

2.3.1 Conservative Sunni Islam

¹⁰⁰ See Karen Armstrong *Islam: A Short History* pp.121-133

In accordance with classical Sunni tradition the prevailing theological interpretation of *tawhid* (the unity of Allah) in 1930's Egypt was limited to an essentially apolitical one, governing one's personal moral behaviour and religious practice in the context of the family and community. The direct domain of Islam was restricted to the level of the individual and the community and effectively excluded—in all but a superficial sense—from the state. The unity of Allah was to be reflected by individual Muslims in their spiritual, personal and communal life by acting in accordance with Islamic edicts and through traditional forms of worship such as prayer and fasting. Political leaders were expected to show public observation of Islam and, at least outwardly, to rule in accordance to its edicts, but were not expected to actively impose Islamic practice on the populace or to rigorously implement and uphold *shar'ia*.¹⁰¹ This was an essentially conservative and pragmatic attitude with a historical pedigree that Albert Bergesen called 'the classic Sunni fear of revolt and disorder.'¹⁰² As long as traditional Islamic observance and practice could continue, channelled through, and controlled by the traditional *ulema* without overt state interference, then the *ulema* would not directly challenge the ruler's legitimacy or authority.¹⁰³ Allah's sovereignty governed individual Muslim's religious practice, their moral conduct, and the life of the Muslim community; it was only notionally extended to the ruler's governance.

The *modus vivendi* between religious and political authority had traditionally been decided upon the question of whether the insincere or 'bad' Muslim could legitimately govern an Islamic society. The mainstream of Sunni jurisprudence taught that the preservation of the social order was of higher priority than the religious sincerity of the ruler. 'No matter how "bad" of a Muslim a ruler was or how insincere,' Natana DeLong-Bas observes, 'classical scholars believed that he should remain in power so as to avoid the social chaos and disruption that were bound to occur with his removal.'¹⁰⁴ The conservative position of the *ulema* can be understood as a reaction to the historical experience of Sunni Islam to the seventh-century Islamic sect, the Kharijites.

¹⁰¹ Bruce Lawrence "Holy War (Jihad) in Islamic Religion and Nation-State Ideologies" p.146

¹⁰² Albert J. Bergesen *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society* p.7

¹⁰³ Thomas Simons *Islam in a Globalizing World* pp.12-13

¹⁰⁴ Natana J. DeLong-Bas *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* p.248

The Kharijites were the third sect, alongside the Sunnis and Shiites created out of the dispute over the successor of the third, assassinated caliph Uthman.¹⁰⁵ The Kharijites formed a distinctive sect because they believed that any pious and capable Muslim could be the leader of the community, unlike the Shiites who claimed caliph lineage belonged exclusively to 'Ali's descendents. In contrast to the Sunnis, the Kharijites asserted that a caliph who did not act in accordance with the Qur'an and following the example of the prophet Mohammad, was guilty of sedition and must be forcibly removed from power. This belief was put into action when 'Ali was assassinated by a Kharijite in 661. Related to the Kharijites' position towards impious rulers was their literalist and strict interpretation of the Qur'an, and the belief that any Muslim caught deviating from their understanding of the *shar'ia* was guilty of *kafir* (unbelief) and should thus be put to death. For the Kharijites the Qur'anic instruction to 'command good and prohibit evil' was to be actively pursued to its logical and often deadly conclusion.

Unsurprisingly, the Kharijites' philosophy was seen by 'Ali and later *ulema* as an alarming threat to social order and political stability resulting in 'Ali sending a contingent of troops to put down the rebellious sect before their beliefs could be disseminated further. Although 'Ali succeeded in quashing the rebels as a military force, some of the Kharijites escaped, and, more significantly so did their ideas.¹⁰⁶ The Kharijites' radical doctrine served as a cautionary tale to the Sunni *ulema* that saw the dangers of an unmediated Qur'an being interpreted literally by disgruntled groups. The *ulema* establishment also internalized the necessary trade-off between political and social stability, and the desirability of pious rulers; generally, the *ulema* preferred the conservative pragmatism of turning a blind-eye to the latter in the hope of maintaining their privileged position and social stability.

The uneasy mutual stance of non-interference between a quietist, conservative Sunni Islamic establishment and political leaders who offered the veneer of an Islamic state was not always

¹⁰⁵ Initially, the Kharijites, along with the Shiites supported the rule of the last of the *rashidun* (rightly-guided caliphs) Caliph 'Ali. In the course of the ensuing civil war between supporters of 'Ali, and the rival claimant for the caliphate—Uthman's cousin, Muawiyah—at the brink of defeat Muawiyah's soldiers held aloft Qur'ans to signify that Allah, not force, should settle the dispute. A section of 'Ali's forces agreed with this sentiment forcing 'Ali to send an arbitrator as a representative. When the two sides met, the arbitrations went badly; the terms of the meeting had not been settled in advance, and when the initial contingent of 'Ali's soldiers discovered that it was 'Ali's legitimacy as a caliph under discussion, they rebelled under the slogan 'Allah's rule alone.' This group formed the Kharijites, they objected both to Muawiyah's claim to the caliphate, which they believed belonged to 'Ali, but also to 'Ali's decision to subject his caliphate to arbitration, which they believed only Allah had the right to do.

¹⁰⁶ Karen Armstrong *Islam: A Short History* p.30

universally accepted. There has been a long history of Islamic thinkers and religious leaders who have rebelled against this conservative compromise particularly in times of major political and social crises. To understand al-Banna's radical rejection of this truce we must briefly examine the history of radical Muslim thinkers who have previously rebelled against the self-imposed constraints of conservative Islam. This will allow us to trace the ideological lineage that al-Banna drew upon to create the philosophy of the Muslim Brotherhood.

2.3.2 Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328)

The medieval scholar, Ibn Taymiyya serves as a frequently referenced, intellectual and inspirational figurehead for the modern Islamist movement. Ibn Taymiyya lived in Damascus during the aftermath of the Mongol invasion that ended the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258).¹⁰⁷ The Mongols brought to an end what was retrospectively considered to be the golden age of Islamic civilization and put in place Mongol leaders.¹⁰⁸ Although the new rulers formally converted to Islam, they continued to follow their own customary practices and law, the Yassa code. Ibn Taymiyya refused to accept the traditional conservative view that however 'bad' or insincere a Muslim the leader may be, social order is preferable to the chaos that would ensue if the leader was deposed. He believed that the legitimate Islamic leader has two tasks: governance by *shar'ia* and the defence of Muslim lands.¹⁰⁹ The failure to achieve either of these would mean that the ruler should not be considered a Muslim and his constituents have the right, or even the duty, to depose of them. Ibn Taymiyya composed the infamous Mardin *fatwa* (religious or legal ruling) justifying *jihad* for the overthrow of unjust leaders or those who superficially professed allegiance to Islam whilst governing against Islamic injunctions.

Although Ibn Taymiyya prudently did not explicitly say so, this was clearly directed against the Mongol rulers. Ibn Taymiyya claimed that the 'bad' ruler was one who governed contrary to *shar'ia* and introduced *bida'* that diverged from the Qur'an and the Sunna. Public implementation of foreign practices would lead the Muslim populace astray from Islam.¹¹⁰ In essence Ibn Taymiyya re-politicised Islam by legitimising the forceful overthrow of

¹⁰⁷ Natana J. DeLong-Bas *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* p.247

¹⁰⁸ Karen Armstrong *Islam: A Short History* pp.82-83

¹⁰⁹ Karen Armstrong *Islam: A Short History* p.89

¹¹⁰ Karen Armstrong *Islam: A Short History* p.89

authorities who transgressed the political implementation of Islamic law, or those that had illegally superseded the 'true' Islamic rulers. The Mongol rulers had clearly committed both these offences by first conquering the Abbasid caliphate and then by introducing the Yassa code at the expense of Islamic law. The metaphor of Mongol rulers, who feign the outward motions of Islamic belief for political capital, but ignore its teachings and introduce 'foreign' laws, persists today amongst Islamists seeking the violent removal of their own 'illegitimate' or 'un-Islamic' governments.

2.3.3 Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792)

The 18th century reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab argued that the degeneracy of Islamic civilization was due to the privatization of the concept of *tawhid*.¹¹¹ He claimed that the neglect of the principle of *tawhid* had led to spiritual and social degeneration. This was partly symbolised, and partly caused by, the worship of extraneous idols, saints, angels and other intercessors that did not form part of Sunni orthodoxy.¹¹² In particular he singled out Sufism as a grotesque distortion of Islam as it deliberately incorporated and conjoined local traditions and forms of worship with Islam; al-Wahhab claimed that Sufis worshiped more than one God and were therefore guilty of apostasy and deserving of death.¹¹³ Furthermore, al-Wahhab denounced any forms of Islamic practice or knowledge not based solely on the original and holy sources of the Qur'an, the *Sunna* and *hadith*.¹¹⁴ By corrupting the pristine message of Islam, with innovations and additions, the Muslim community had also been corrupted, weakening and fracturing the *umma* and creating factionalism. Al-Wahhab made the link between the decay of the divine message and the decay of society with the decline of the *umma*. Only the divine text, the practices and saying of the Prophet, and the correct interpretations based on these texts, could be used as the basis of the Islamic state.

Ibn Taymiyya had justified *jihad* in order to resist rulers who were very obviously governing contrary to *shar'ia*. In effect Ibn Taymiyya used *tawhid* as a negative or reactive standard justifying the removal of leaders clearly failing in their duty to implement the *shar'ia*. Al-Wahhab went further than Ibn Taymiyya by claiming that all aspects of political life should

¹¹¹ The concept of *tawhid* is discussed in more detail below.

¹¹² Youssef Choueiri *Islamic Fundamentalism* p.8

¹¹³ Roy Jackson *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* p.159

¹¹⁴ The *Sunna* are the collected traditions of the Prophet's practice and habits, the *Hadith* are his sayings. These are separate from the divinely revealed Qur'an.

be conducted not only in accordance with Islam, but solely by its standard. For al-Wahhab Islam was the exclusive criterion of legitimacy; any addition to, or manipulation of *shar'ia* was illegitimate *bida'*. To rectify this Allah had to be recognized both 'as the creator and sustainer [sic] of all life and as the ultimate sovereign and lawgiver.'¹¹⁵ Recognising that Allah cannot rule directly, al-Wahhab specified that political leadership should not be based on worldly values such as wealth, birth or stature but on knowledge of the Qur'an and the *hadith*. This meant the restoration of Islam from the private domain to the centre of public and political life and eventually formed the ideological basis of the modern Wahhabism.¹¹⁶

Wahhabism is one movement within the broader Salafist ideology, although the two terms are often (incorrectly) used interchangeably. Salafism, taking its name from '*salaf*' meaning 'the righteous ancestors,' is a puritanical creed that aims to make a purified Islam the sole focus of public and private life. The focus of Salafism is to purge Islam of all *bida'* that have corroded and corrupted the religion since the time of the Mohammed and the first three generations of Muslims. Since it cannot be known exactly how Islam was practiced during its nascent period, and that the application of a 7th century socio-political system to the modern world is open to a multitude of divergent interpretations, the Salafi ideology reflects more of an idealised position than a concrete movement. The Salafi impulse ranges from the reactive, utopian idea of returning to a pristine Islam by discarding all the implements of modernity, to the renewal, resurgence and relocation of Islam to the centre of human life in the modern era. This explains how very different types of movements from the ultra-conservative Wahhabi, through the politically radical Muslim Brotherhood, to the violent extremism of al-Qaeda, can all be located under the Salafist ideological umbrella.

2.3.4 Sayyid Jamal-al-din al-Afghani (1838-1897)

¹¹⁵ Natana J. DeLong-Bas *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* p.9

¹¹⁶ The success of al-Wahhab and the subsequent Wahhabi movement was a result of a political alliance forged between al-Wahhab and an Arabian tribal chief, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud. The puritanical reformist message of al-Wahhab, in alliance with ibn Sa'ud's warriors proved a potent mix and swept through northern Arabia and captured Mecca in 1803. The movement was eventually defeated as a military force when Muhammad Ali, the governor of Egypt was sent by the Ottoman sultans to put down the faction. Despite this setback, the message of al-Wahhab survived within the tribes and remerged in 1902 under the leadership of Abd al-Aziz ibn Sa'ud—a descendent of ibn Sa'ud. With the founding of Saudi Arabia in 1932, deeply conservative Wahhabism became an established Islamic doctrine and has subsequently been exported around the Islamic world, funded by Saudi petrodollars.

Sayyid al-Afghani advocated a very different type of Islamic revival to al-Wahhab. Faced with the question of the survival of Islam in a world increasingly dominated by Europe and their imperialist forces, al-Afghani spearheaded the educated urban response. Born and educated in Iran, al-Afghani then relocated to Egypt in 1871 where he attracted a small circle of followers to his ideas and message of reform. Al-Afghani shared the tribal response of al-Wahhab—the solution to the problems of the *umma* lay in a return to Islam—but for the urbane milieu this did not entail a wholesale rejection of modernity. Al-Afghani's followers, some of whom had been educated in European universities, wanted to retain and incorporate the exciting scientific and technological advancements but at the same time reject imperialism and reverse the decline of Islam. Instead of trying to reject modernity al-Afghani wanted to embrace it and modernise Islam. The problem he faced was how to reconcile a rejection of Western cultural values but selectively retain scientific elements and frame the entire project as a return to Islam.¹¹⁷

Al-Afghani managed to partially ameliorate these contradictions by promoting an agenda of *jihād* that focused attention on taking action and thus distracted from any potential ideological discrepancies. The political activism that al-Afghani promoted was based around a call for Islamic solidarity and resistance to imperialism. His charismatic personality meant that he attracted a popular following, prompting one commentator to note that al-Afghani's life 'touched and deeply affected the whole Islamic world in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.'¹¹⁸ After coming to the attention of officials in Egypt he was expelled to India in 1879 but five years later he emigrated to Paris where he published an Arabic journal *al-Urwah al-Wuthqa*—The Indissoluble Bond.¹¹⁹ This publication established al-Afghani's message of political solidarity based on the shared bonds of Islam, and the common enemy of the West. This represented the first major, modern ideal of pan-Islamism. The journal also signified the intention of al-Afghani and his followers to embrace modern technology and techniques of mass communication to disseminate their message and garner support for their pan-Islamic cause.

The articles published in al-Afghani's journal formed the basis of his views and proved important for the formation of al-Banna's worldview. Al-Afghani believed that the political

¹¹⁷ Derek Hopwood "The Culture of Modernity in Islam and the Middle East" pp.3-4

¹¹⁸ Albert Hourani cited in William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.125

¹¹⁹ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.125

ascendency of Europe and the corresponding decline of the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic lands did not demonstrate the superiority of the West. In agreement with al-Wahhab al-Banna thought that Islam had fallen into a state of moral decay and decadence due to the infiltration of foreign ideas and cultural practices. Islam had been neglected by Muslims and abused by their leaders; the *umma* had lost faith in the power of their religion and had, in the face of European dominance, grown apathetic and subdued. After al-Afghani's stay in India and observing the failure of the Indian Mutiny, he became convinced that imperialist forces threatened the Middle East, and only Islamic solidarity could resist Western hegemony. Al-Afghani was clearly motivated by the themes of solidarity and action, and was primarily interested in Islam as a political force in the world rather than an object of personal religious belief, a fact reflected in al-Afghani's failure to marry. This lack of concern with the anachronistic, theological details of Islam allowed al-Afghani to envisage a rejuvenated Islam that transcended partisan divisions of race, language and denomination; an Islam that embraced modern technologies, and acted as a bulwark against the European cultural, political and economic power.

2.3.5 Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905)

If al-Afghani sketched the crude outlines of a political pan-Islamism, then his pupil, Muhammad 'Abduh was left with the arduous task of filling in the ideological and theological details. 'Abduh agreed with al-Afghani that Islam's biggest challenge came from Europe, but that this also represented a unique opportunity to unite the *umma* in a way that had been impossible since the time of the *rashidun* (rightly-guided caliphs). However, 'Abduh did not view Islam as a mere tool to ferment a collective identity, instead he emphasised the theology of Islam as the key to an Islamic revival. Similarly 'Abduh agreed with al-Wahhab that centuries of accumulated traditions and alien practices had reified Islam and turned it from a dynamic, living and all-encompassing way of life into a staid and paralysed set of irrelevant anachronisms that left the *umma* vulnerable to outside forces. Unlike al-Wahhab's turn away from the modern towards a stripped back, ascetic Islam, 'Abduh argued that Islam should embrace modernity. Muslims should not have to choose between Islam and the modern world because the two need not be mutually exclusive.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Roy Jackson *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* p.174

'Abduh's response to the challenge of modernity was a mixture of pragmatism and idealism. The spectre of European domination could only be resisted by a new approach to modernity. Religions, argued 'Abduh, needs a state within which to survive, and for the state to be durable and strong, requires wealth. This can only be generated by 'the people and the people's wealth is not possible without the spread of these sciences amongst them so that they may know the ways for acquiring wealth.'¹²¹ 'Abduh's claim, that Muslim states, and their populace, needed to embrace modern science and economic systems was not merely a practical survival strategy, it also formed the core of 'Abduh's theological stance. 'Abduh wanted to show that Islam and modernity were not antithetical, or merely compatible, but were, in fact complementary.¹²² This meant going further than the secular approach of separating religion from other forms of knowledge in the expectation that they need not impinge on one another, and demonstrating that in Islam reason and revelation are two sides of the same coin.

In 'Abduh's most famous work *Risalat al-Tawhid* (The Theology of Unity), he reconnected science and Islam using two techniques.¹²³ Firstly, he showed how the Qur'an, as a divine and therefore perfect text, anticipated modern scientific discoveries, but that these needed to be reinterpreted within a modern context.¹²⁴ Secondly, 'Abduh wanted to resurrect and transform the concept of *ijtihad*, a term originally used to describe the process of forming legal judgements by *mujtahid* (learned scholars of the *shar'ia*) based on independent reasoning or interpretation of legal sources. 'Abduh reinterpreted *ijtihad* as a general form of independent human reasoning or thinking enjoined by Islam on Muslims.¹²⁵ This meant that all Muslims had the right to make reasoned judgements, using their rational faculties gifted by Allah, about all matters where the Qur'an or the *hadith* had not specifically mentioned.

By taking a traditional Islamic concept and relocating it within a modern context with a new political emphasis 'Abduh was participating in a tradition of Muslim reformers that lent historical weight to essentially new and radical ideas. It seems that 'Abduh's aim in opening up the gates of reason was to find a way to reappropriate scientific research as an activity not

¹²¹ Muhammad 'Abduh cited in Elma Harder "Muhammad 'Abduh"

¹²² John L. Esposito *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* pp.57-58

¹²³ Roy Jackson *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* p.174

¹²⁴ For example, 'Abduh argued that *jinn*s (genies) in the Qur'an should be understood in an age of modern medicine as microbes. Further investigation of the Qur'an and the *hadith* would reveal more links of this kind which for now are beyond human understanding.

¹²⁵ Roy Jackson *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.175

just compatible with, but essential to correct Islamic practice. This circumscribed and narrow end could not, however, be contained by the possibilities inherent in the new meaning that 'Abduh endowed on *ijtihad*. By opening the gates of reasoning, one also creates the possibility of reinterpreting the divine texts, and as any Muslim can participate in interpretation and reasoning, the spectrum of possible ways in which to understand the Qur'an is radically expanded. Furthermore, apart from the qualifier of 'rational' judgement, 'Abduh did not limit who could take place in this project, and so did not provide a definitive way of telling which interpretations were authoritative. At a stroke it seemed that any literate Muslim could make pronouncements on the meaning of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, and there was no obvious method of deciding which of the interpretations was correct, or indeed who was qualified to authenticate or invalidate them. The lasting legacy of 'Abduh's work was to undermine the authority that had traditionally resided within the confines of the *ulema* and decentralize and democratize the divine texts.

The two poles of this spectrum of interpretation are the liberal and radical positions. Using the principle of *ijtihad* liberal or modernist Islam broadly claims, for example, that the Qur'an and *hadith* call for democratic institutions, religious tolerance, human rights and equal rights for women. Conversely, radical Islamist groups use the same principle of *ijtihad* to variously demonstrate that Islam stands for a form of social justice that necessitates a violent *jihad* that defeats the purported enemies of Islam and facilitates the unimpeded spread of *da'wa* around the world. These two irreconcilable views are, nevertheless, connected by the shared principle of *ijtihad* and thus exclude the possibility of finding an objective viewpoint from which one group could criticise the other. Although both sides accuse their opponents of wilful misinterpretation based on taking passages of the Qur'an or *hadith* out of context and manipulating them for their own nefarious ends, neither are willing to surrender the principle of *ijtihad*; rational understanding of Islam is allowed, so long as the *correct* interpretation is employed. 'Abduh had intended to open the gates of reasoning, but in doing so he opened the floodgates of heterodox interpretation.

2.4 The Ideology of Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood

Like his four intellectual predecessors Hasan al-Banna was reacting to the onset of foreign forces that created series of crises for traditional Egyptian life. In the previous section we

examined the accelerated modernising and westernising agenda forced top-down by Mohammed Ali, Isma'il Pasha and the French and British colonial regimes.¹²⁶ We saw how the eager embrace of modernity created political, economic and social crises and sparked several violent revolts and revolutions culminating in the burning of Cairo in 1952 and the Nasser *coup d'état*. In the face of this tumult al-Banna saw the failure of the traditional centres of authority in Islam capitulate and fail to act. Years of ossified conservative Islamic orthodoxy had lost touch with the original utopian promise of the early Islamic community. Traditional forms of Egyptian life bound up with traditional Islamic practice faced the wrenching onslaught of modernity imposed by foreign forces and unaccountable political leaders with no protection provided by the Islamic establishment. By trying to reconcile the painful and destructive dualisms created by the unequal encounter of modernity with tradition al-Banna, following the path laid out by his predecessors, forged a response far removed from Sunni orthodoxy: the modern Islamist ideology. We must now examine these themes further and critically examine the details of the ideology.

When diagnosing the problems of Muslims in 1920's Egypt al-Banna employed a mode of language and a style of argumentation that still carry currency with modern Islamists. He lamented that:

[a] wave of dissolution which undermined all firm beliefs was engulfing Egypt in the name of intellectual emancipation. This trend attacked the morals, deeds and virtues under the pretext of personal freedom. Nothing could stand against this powerful and tyrannical stream of disbelief and permissiveness that was sweeping our country... I saw the social life of the beloved Egyptian people, oscillating between her dear and precious Islam which she had inherited, defended, lived with during fourteen centuries, and this severe Western invasion which was armed and equipped with all destructive influences of money, wealth, prestige, ostentation, power and means of propaganda.¹²⁷

The dichotomy of the siren of decrepit and hollow Western values, and authentic but neglected Islamic values is a recurring theme of the nascent Islamist ideology.¹²⁸ In addition to the spiritual malaise created by the encounter with Westernism and modernism al-Banna also regretted the more tangible political, economic and military dominance of Western

¹²⁶ Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri "Contextualising Neo-Islamism" p.3

¹²⁷ Hasan al-Banna cited in Brynjar Lia *The Society of Muslim Brothers In Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* p.28

¹²⁸ Bernard Lewis *The Crisis Of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* pp.101-102

colonial powers. The Muslim Brotherhood remained virulently anti-British throughout its existence although the leadership tried to reign in overt expressions of anti-imperialism in order to prevent it falling foul of the Political Police.¹²⁹ This anti-Western theme was partly founded upon the belief that young Muslims had become unduly fascinated by the West, in particular its cultural exports, resulting in a widespread inferiority complex, and the devaluation of the indigenous culture and religion. Al-Banna believed that the encroaching Westernization of the Islamic world had to be combated by reinvigorating Egyptian youth with a robust and renascent Islamic identity. Ironically, despite this multifaceted rejection of the West, al-Banna remained open to the adoption of Western techniques of modern propaganda and educational techniques to further the Brotherhood's goals.

2.4.1 Sense of Disgrace and Crises

Central to the propaganda employed by the Brotherhood was the theme of humiliation and disgrace suffered by Muslims under the dominance of the West. The emaciated modern Muslim society was contrasted with a constructed ideal of glorious Islamic civilizations of the past, in particular with the early expansionist era of the *rashidun* following Mohammed. This humiliation found its most concrete expressions in the regions of Egypt most clearly under British economic control and political influence. The Suez Canal Zone was a particularly obvious example of British imperialism, and it was here, in the town of Isma'iliyya that al-Banna began his professional career and founded the first branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The symbols and symptoms of imperialism that al-Banna found in Isma'iliyya shaped the fiercely anti-colonial strain in the Brotherhood's ideology. Here the British army camps clearly displayed the military dominance of the British occupation, but equally repugnant to al-Banna was the economic dominance of the Suez Canal Company. This sense of weakness and humiliation was compounded with 'complete foreign domination of the public utilities ... the conspicuously luxurious homes of the foreigners overlooking the 'miserable' homes of their workers ... [and] even the street signs ... were written in [English].'¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Brynjar Lia *The Society of Muslim Brothers In Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* p.81

¹³⁰ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.7

Al-Banna saw the years following the First World War as a disastrous period for the Egyptian and worldwide *umma*. The global upheavals in and around the Muslim world resulted in the destruction of the imagined spiritual and political unity of the early Muslim community. The insidious seed of doubt, expressed as atheism, materialism or secularism, planted after the First World War had created ‘orientations of apostasy and nihilism.’¹³¹ Several critical events contributed to this dissolution of faith and unity of the *umma*. The 1919 Egyptian revolution against the British had resulted in fierce political infighting between the two main parties—the popularist Wafd and the modernising Liberals—and the unpopular compromise that allowed the continued presence of British forces in Egypt. On the global stage Mustafa Kemal Ataturk inaugurated a secularist revolution in Turkey and disbanded the Caliphate—the last potent symbol of Islamic unity. Al-Banna believed that Egyptian intellectuals, spurred by Ataturk’s revolution, planned to subvert orthodox Islam under the banner of an ‘intellectual and social emancipation’ of Egypt.¹³² Al-Banna gathered these currents together, along with reformists in the Egyptian universities; ‘secularist ... literary and social salons;’ and the modernist media, to create a compelling picture of a wholesale attack on Islam and traditional cultural values, hierarchies and practices.¹³³

These events and trends were interpreted by al-Banna as undermining the unity and integrity of Islam. For al-Banna and his followers the theme of unity was of critical importance and was the standard to be applied to a range of social, political, religious and cultural problems. In keeping with the ideal of unity all of these issues were combined into a singular, but multifaceted ideological complex; and, as we shall see, the solution would have to be unitary in form too.¹³⁴ Anything which enjoined unity was to be encouraged, whilst anything that threatened disunity or heterogeneity of any kind, was to be fiercely resisted. Two theological concepts were appropriated by the Muslim Brotherhood to express these themes: *tawhid* and *fitna*.

2.4.2 Tawhid

¹³¹ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.6

¹³² Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.7

¹³³ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.7

¹³⁴ Greg Fealy “Hizbut Tahrir In Indonesia: Seeking a ‘Total’ Islamic Identity” p.161

Tawhid literally translates as ‘making one’ and refers specifically to the oneness or unity of Allah. The ritual corollary of *tawhid* is the *shahada*; the Islamic declaration of faith: ‘There is no God but Allah. Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’ The declaration of the *shahada* forms one of the five pillars of Islam and its most fundamental and central creed. Accordingly, the sincere recital of the *shahada* is the formal and sufficient condition of converting to Islam or the reaffirmation of one’s membership to the *umma*. *Tawhid* testifies to the singularity and uniqueness of Allah and thus the unity, universality and totality of His sovereignty as revealed by the prophet Mohammed. Islam, translated as ‘submission,’ refers to the duty of mankind to submit to Allah’s will upon hearing His message.

Al-Banna combined the tradition of resistance of Ibn Taymiyya, the salafist theology of al-Wahhab, the activism of al-Afghani and the technological modernism of ‘Abduh, to forge the new ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³⁵ Al-Banna added to this mix his impulse towards education-oriented grassroots social reform, his organizational skills and his personal charisma and leadership qualities. This was not an attempt to regress to an archaic Islam—as the pejorative ‘fundamentalism’ suggests—but a thoroughly ‘modern, innovative, and modernizing’ movement.¹³⁶ Al-Banna extended the logic and imperative of *tawhid* so that it did not operate solely at the personal level but also at the cultural, political, legal and economic level of society and the state. The aim was not only to orientate these areas towards a unified Islamic whole, but also to effect a fundamental shift and achieve a totalised Islamic existence; reflecting both the oneness of Allah and His absolute sovereignty.

2.4.3 Fitna

The issue of disunity was extremely important to al-Banna and his followers. The word *fitna* was appropriated to describe the evil of disunity and the related harms associated with it. The closest literal translation of *fitna* is ‘trial’ or ‘temptation,’ from which follows the negative connotations of ‘treachery, persecution, seduction, enchantment, or disorder.’¹³⁷ The context of the definition originates from a *hadith* reporting that the greatest *fitna* for men is the sedition caused by the illicit temptation of women. Within a socio-political context *fitna* refers to periods of strife within the Muslim community. The first civil war within Islam

¹³⁵ See Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* pp.232-234

¹³⁶ Karen Armstrong *The Battle For God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* p.369

¹³⁷ "Fitnah" *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. ed. John Esposito

caused by the assassination of Caliph Uthman and fought over control of the caliphate, is called the first *fitna* and describes the breakdown of the unity of the early Muslim *umma* and the political and social chaos that ensued.¹³⁸ Importantly, this event heralded the first major schism within the Muslim community, resulting in the *umma* turning in on itself and halting its outward expansion.¹³⁹ *Fitna* therefore has multiple meanings within several contexts including disunity, division, schism, chaos, agitation and rebellion. Whatever the particular meaning in a certain context *fitna* always has strong negative connotations.

For the Muslim Brothers, *fitna* represented the antithesis of *tawhid* and thus established an important dualistic moral continuum. Anything that promoted *tawhid* necessarily came at the expense of *fitna* and was, therefore, a good thing, and the converse—the promotion of *fitna* at the cost of *tawhid*—was an evil to be resisted. The Brothers' preoccupation with *fitna* rested on two, interrelated grounds. The first was the Islamic injunction for Muslims to live in loving 'brotherhood' with their brethren. This theological imperative explains the Muslim Brotherhood's name and the centrality of unity in their ideology. The second, connected explanation was based in political pragmatism; divided the *umma* as a political force was weak and unable to resist the parasitic forces of the West.

This mutually exclusive principle, with its two poles of *tawhid* and *fitna*, was applied within a variety of disparate fields including politics, economics, religion and cultural expression. The application of a bipolar critical scale has the useful property of unifying and making sense of a host of different issues within a singular framework. A result of this simplified approach was that the message and philosophy of the Brothers was coherent, easy to disseminate and could be understood and applied by their members.¹⁴⁰ We shall identify four key domains where, for the Brothers, Western dualities wrought havoc on the ideal of Islamic unity: politics, economics, society and the law. Whilst doing so it should be borne in mind that all of these fields were regarded as part of a single problem by the Brothers and so were not understood separately, but blended into a coherent whole. Furthermore, these dualisms were interdependent and fed into one another, the culmination of which would mean the decay and demise of Islam and traditional Egyptian life.

¹³⁸ Karen Armstrong *Islam: A Short History* pp.28-29

¹³⁹ Interestingly contemporaneous Muslim writers used the word *fitna* to describe the French revolution.

¹⁴⁰ Bernard Lewis *The Crisis Of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* pp.102-103

2.4.4 Politics

One interesting consequence of the *tawhid-fitna* principle is the Brothers' early eschewal of politics, or more precisely, political partisanship. Al-Banna viewed the evils of imperialism through the prism of *fitna*. Accordingly, the principal method by which imperialist forces dominated Egypt was to divide the people into various artificial groups (Egyptians and foreigners, the urban rich and poor, state bureaucrats and ordinary workers, landowners and tenant farmers) with competing interests and turn these groups against one another. This tactic operated through two complementary channels: firstly, the direct interference and machinations of the foreign imperialists; and secondly, the internal forces that, consciously or otherwise, served the interests of the imperialists, or treated them with indifference, resulting in 'a dead pacifism, lowly humiliation, and acceptance of the *status quo*.'¹⁴¹ These were respectively labelled by the Brothers as 'external' and 'internal' or 'domestic' imperialism.

According to al-Banna the most insidious forms of domestic imperialism was perpetuated by Egyptian political parties. The Brothers held a comprehensive list of grievances against parties and their leaders. Political parties only operated to serve the interests of their members, particularly their leaders, as they were 'led by men, not ideas.'¹⁴² This meant that parties dominated and ruled the people rather than acting as their servants. Furthermore, they had no genuine programmes of social or political reform, and just used these as guises to gain control of the state. Personal prestige rather than social ideals guided the leaders, who were willing to employ any tactic in the pursuit of power. Adopting familiar communist rhetoric the Brothers asserted that the system of political parties supported the capitalist system, the 'political instrument by means of which the capitalist exploited the workers,' and appropriated the legal and bureaucratic instruments of the state for their own ends.¹⁴³

The visceral hatred of political parties lies at the heart of the Brothers' stance on imperialism. Domestic imperialism did not only support and sustain external imperialism; it also mirrored and reproduced its ideas. Thus the fact that Egyptian political parties, set within a constitutional parliamentary system, resembled foreign forms of political organization and ideology was reason enough for the Brothers to reject it. This was understood by al-Banna as

¹⁴¹ Mohammed al-Ghazali cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.218

¹⁴² Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.218

¹⁴³ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.218

a form of cultural imperialism, whereby Western ideas, concepts and modes of organization were uncritically reproduced in Egypt resulting in the moral decay of Egyptian society and maintained the grip of the imperial power on its host. The ideology of the West was hollow and decrepit, thus the allegation that ideas or values were 'Western' was sufficient for the Brotherhood to reject them. This antagonism to anything 'Western' served as a reference point for the Brothers' attitude to a range of political and economic questions, and partly explains their hostile stance against capitalism and materialism.

The political parties and their leaders were particularly susceptible to Western cultural and economic hegemony. They blindly adopted Western modes of thought, organization, values and ideology and then sought to project this Western facsimile onto Egyptian society. They were, the Brothers charged, incompetent Muslims, in effect they had been schooled in Western thought so thoroughly that they had lost sight of their Egyptian and Islamic heritage, 'they forgot their glory, their history and their past.'¹⁴⁴ The Brothers' concern was that if the Egyptian political process was normalized to resemble British parliamentary democracy then the corrupt Western values adopted by the political leaders would leach irreversibly into their constituents thus making imperial control a *fait accompli*. By implementing a Western legal, economic and political structure the fabric of Islam would be destroyed. One Brother summed up this process with the complaint that Egypt had accepted 'independence, a constitution, and a parliamentary system before we expelled England from Egypt.'¹⁴⁵

2.4.5 Economy

Variouly labelled by the Brothers as materialism, greed, economic tyranny, and exploitation; the Brotherhood took a dim view of a capitalist economy. Their critique of capitalism can be broken into three parts: 1) the corrupt and inequitable Egyptian capitalist economy; 2) imperial control of the economy and the leaching of resources and wealth; 3) philosophical objections to the corrupting influence of materialism. The first two categories borrowed heavily from socialist rhetoric derived from the active Egyptian communist party formed three years before the Muslims Brothers. The third category was cast within theological terminology and was mainly used as a potent tool to disparage and castigate the soiled

¹⁴⁴ Mohammed al-Ghazali cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.219

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous Muslim Brotherhood member cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.218

Western 'soul.' At the same time as heavily borrowing socialist language and argument structure, the Brothers also wanted to separate themselves from the 'atheist' communists. This required the Brothers to tread a narrow and sometimes contradictory path; they utilized the familiar ideology of the left in order to attract potential supports from the communist camp, particularly from the student population, but at the same time castigated the atheism of the communist party and their links with the Soviet Union.

2.4.6 Domestic Capitalism

The Brothers' complaints against Egyptian economic system centred around the polarisation of wealth and the inequitable dualisms of land-holder and tenant farmer, factory owners and labourers, the rich and the poor. One set of problems diagnosed by the Brothers concerned the ownership of land and the exploitation by landlords of their tenants. Although abolished in law, the Brothers claimed that Egypt was stuck in a feudal economic system, where the landless masses were exploited by the few landlords and kept in a permanent state of deprivation and humiliation. This created three major harms: 1) poverty and its related ills of poor health, miserable living conditions and quality of life; 2) usurpation of the sovereignty of Allah by making the few landlords the masters of the poor; and 3) the division of society (*fitna*) into mutually exclusive groups that uneasily coexist within an exploitative relationship.

The first ill-effect of capitalism diagnosed by al-Banna was the poverty caused by low-paid jobs, urbanization and unemployment. Egypt in the 1920s was undergoing a post-war demographic boom resulting in an exodus from the countryside of young people, who, having received a minimal education, had expectations of a better life but were unable to find employment to attain it.¹⁴⁶ This led to an unruly expansion of the fringes of Egyptian cities resulting in an urban sprawl of poor quality, squalid housing and an underdeveloped utilities infrastructure. So disgusted were the Brothers with the living conditions of the poor that the streets 'deserve nothing better than destruction by dynamite,' so that they may be rebuilt anew.¹⁴⁷ The image of families subsisting in hovels surrounded by raw sewage was the operative illustration of the effects of capitalism on Egypt.

¹⁴⁶ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.6

¹⁴⁷ Mohammed al-Ghazali cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.221

Al-Banna was not exclusively interested in the immediate effects of poverty and poor sanitation on health and well-being; he was also concerned with its consequences on education, and the social and moral health of the community. He believed that poor education and poverty co-existed in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Related to the problems of poverty and education, the Brothers claimed that the social and moral fabric of Egyptian society was being torn apart by the poverty caused by capitalism. The lack of wage-paying jobs meant that the sons were unable to afford their own house, and therefore, living with their families, were unable to marry. The sexual mores of traditional Egyptian society meant that a generation of sexually frustrated young males were being led astray by the easy Western temptations of alcohol, dance halls, gambling, pornography, adultery and pre-marital sex. Humans forced to live in base conditions will tend towards base behaviour; or, as Qutb later wrote '[poverty] corrupts the character and the conscience.'¹⁴⁸

The descent into immoral, *haraam* (forbidden) forms of behaviour conspired to create a generational gap between sons and fathers—the young and old—leading to the estrangement of families and the collapse of traditional social structures and hierarchies. Furthermore, the materialist sirens of the West left the young devoid of dignity and aspiration, unable to find work they stagnated in poverty and thus completed the cycle of dependency and inertia. The Brothers' critique of poverty with its economic immobilisation of a generation and devastating impact on Islamic values and traditional social structures is a good demonstration of the Brothers' ability to weave a single, unified narrative from an array of disparate problems. However, unlike other social and religious groups who also surveyed Egyptian society and produced a similar diagnosis, the Brothers framed the narrative within their unique Islamist ideology, thereby distinguishing themselves from potential competitors.

The second evil of capitalism concerned not just the direct, material consequences of poverty, but the usurpation of the absolute sovereignty of Allah by making the capitalists the masters of the poor. This is replicated throughout the economic system with land-owners maintaining an exploitative feudal relationship with their tenants. Instead of investing in social projects to benefit the people and the country, capitalists invested in schemes that serve their personal interests and perpetuated the economic *status quo*. The fundamental equality promised by the *shahada*—the equal submission of all before one God, and no-one but God—is broken by the

¹⁴⁸ Sayyid Qutb cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.221

material subjugation of the poor to the rich. The domination of one group by another extended to the political realm where the Brothers clearly saw that economic power was readily translated into political power leading to the charge that the government taxed the poor but represented the rich. This multiplied the sins of capitalism and further entrenched the competing groups in their respective system.

2.4.7 Economic Imperialism

For the Brothers the economic relationship between the imperialists and Egypt was like that of a parasite and its host. The imperialists consisted of both the foreign elements and those who had assumed Egyptian nationality; they had 'taken for their own and for their native country's interests the best of the natural resources of the country.'¹⁴⁹ They had gained a monopolistic control of the utilities, industry and commerce and 'continue to view the Egyptian citizen, the Egyptian worker, and the Egyptian rulers without esteem and without justice.'¹⁵⁰ Not only were the imperialists leaching resources from their host but they treated the Egyptians as slaves, subjugated to the master's will. This humiliating position of servitude was accepted by the majority of Egyptians as the imperialist domination had broken their dignity and foreign ideas had corrupted their souls; the imperialist's sovereignty and superiority, and Egyptian servitude had been internalised. As will be expected the emphasis of the Brothers' critique rested on the idea that the Muslims had been forced to accept the sovereignty of other men, the imperialists, and so had ignored the sovereignty of Allah. The corruption of the ideal of *tawhid* was the essence of the problem, with all of the associated consequences—such as poverty—being mere symptoms.

2.4.8 Society: Culture and Family Life

A further objection raised by the Brothers against materialism was related to its corrupting effect on the Muslim soul. This issue is intimately connected with the second problematic concerning the Brothers, culture and family life, and demonstrates the interconnectedness of their worldview. As we have already examined the Brothers argued that one outcome of capitalism was the destabilisation of traditional family structures due to high unemployment and the economic and social inertia of Egyptian youth. In addition to this direct consequence,

¹⁴⁹ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.222

¹⁵⁰ Sayyid Qutb cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.222

the Brothers claimed that materialism had a debasing effect on young Egyptians. The concept of materialism was intimately connected with the West and was often rhetorically connected with the 'greed' of Western imperialism. The professed higher virtue of Islamic spirituality was contrasted with the voracious appetite of the West for base pleasures such as sexual gratification, gambling, and inebriation. The West had become thoroughly contaminated by materialism: 'The Western world, during [recent] centuries, has been materialist in tissue and fibre ... resulting in a deadening of human sentiments and sympathies, and in the extinction of godly endeavours and spiritual values.'¹⁵¹ The essential difference between Western materialism and Islam was that the former was only concerned with temporarily satisfying the insatiable base desires of man, whilst the latter served only God.

Connected with the Brothers' construction of Western materialism was the idea of cultural imperialism. This was the process whereby the imperialists surreptitiously implanted materialist impulses within Egyptians, thus corrupting their souls and ensuring the continuing dominion of the West over the East. In line with the rest of al-Banna's worldview, the apathetic and impressionable youth were susceptible targets of this form of imperialist control. The Brothers accepted that the materialist trappings of the West were not simply forced upon Egyptians, but also leached across and were actively sought out by young Muslims. This occurred due to the proximity and availability of Western temptations, for example dance-halls and cinemas in the cities and the legalisation of the consumption and selling of alcohol, and was compounded by the addictive and cyclical nature of these activities. Furthermore Egyptian youth were lulled into a degenerate moral state by the collapse of traditional social structures, their inadequate Islamic education, high unemployment and so provided a willing receptacle for Western temptations to take hold.

The guiding metaphor employed to describe this process was that of the foreign temptress seducing her unwitting victims, with her beguiling appearance, but riddled with contagious and ultimately deadly disease. This image provided both the structure of the Brothers' concern with a variety of Western cultural practices, such as cinema, provocative clothing, lewd dancing and 'suggestive' music, and with a provocative seam of language with which these things could be described, labelled and condemned. Additionally, the Brothers' tactic of sectioning off inauthentic Western practices from authentic Islamic ones, allowed them to

¹⁵¹ "Al-Dawa" cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.226

construct an easily identifiable barrier between themselves and the Western or Westernized 'other,' around which they could rally. By having a group which could be readily identified, at least rhetorically, as the enemy, the Brothers cemented the internal cohesion and loyalty of their own, included membership. This had the additional benefit of promoting the internal unity of the group, important for any organization, but vital for reinforcing the Brotherhood's ideological position.

Apart from the culture of entertainment, indulgence in base pleasures and mass media, the Brothers were also deeply concerned about new roles for women that displaced them from their traditional role as wife and mother. The moral corruption of woman was of special concern for al-Banna as they were pivotal for the health of the traditional family structure and for the moral education of their children.¹⁵² However, al-Banna's concern with the role of Islamic women was not entirely reactionary. Concerned with the correct Islamic education of all young Muslims, one of the Muslim Brotherhood's first major undertakings was to form an Islamic school for girls in 1933. The 'Institute for the Mothers of the Believers' retroactively constituted the first branch of the Muslim Sisters in 1944. Despite al-Banna's efforts the Muslim Sisters did not expand to the same degree as the Brothers, attracting, at its peak only 5000 members.¹⁵³ In part, this was due to resistance from the Brotherhood members, who were suspicious of anything that resembled the displacement of women from their traditional roles.¹⁵⁴

The degeneration of moral standards caused by exposure to Western culture not only led to *kufir* (disbelief) and the abandonment of 'true' Islam but also created an ethical and cultural dualism for young Muslims.¹⁵⁵ Al-Banna was not solely interested in immoral behaviour but also the apathy generated by the multiple dualisms of modern life. Young Muslims that were caught between two sets of ethical values, and simultaneously attracted and repulsed by two cultural paradigms, would oscillate between these worlds and be rendered insensible by the confusion. The first stage to solving this dilemma, according to al-Banna, is to clearly identify the true boundaries of these worlds and then purge Islam of any Western impurities.

¹⁵² The Brothers' attitude towards women, however, was progressive in some respects particularly when compared with the official rulings of al-Azhar. For instance, the Brothers eventually accepted that contraception could be used in certain circumstances, reflecting their pragmatic response to the issue of overpopulation.

¹⁵³ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.175

¹⁵⁴ Perhaps the more pertinent reason for the Sisters' stunted growth was that its potential constituents did not believe that the social program of the Brothers was compatible with their own goals of emancipation.

¹⁵⁵ Bernard Lewis *The Crisis Of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* p.103

Only by resolving these dualisms into a unitary truth of Islam, could the inertia and servitude of Muslims to the West be overcome.

2.4.9 Education

The institutionalized conservatism of al-Azhar University symbolised, and reinforced, the problems for Islam in 1920s Egypt. Founded in 975 AD al-Azhar is the centre for Sunni scholarship in the Arab world and the second oldest surviving university in the world.¹⁵⁶ With this heritage it is not surprising, therefore, that al-Azhar remains bastion of conservative theology, but al-Banna was not just railing against the university's theology, he was critical of their lack of application of Islam outside of a privatised devotional framework. He believed that the university's rectors were essentially quietist, passive and even complicit—they supported the ruling powers regardless of who they were or how they ruled, in an implicit exchange for non-interference with the running of the university. Al-Azhar would issue *fatwas* supporting the regime and its policies when necessary, and in return would be assured of state funding and allowed to govern its internal affairs. With the Muslim world disintegrating around them, al-Banna dryly remarked 'the *ulama*' saw and observed and heard and did nothing.'¹⁵⁷

The central problem for al-Banna with al-Azhar was that over the centuries it had ossified Islam into a static, ancient set of impenetrable dogmas—'dry, dead [and] ritualistic'—that had lost relevance for the needs of ordinary Muslims.¹⁵⁸ Al-Banna held the opposite view, Islam is, or should be a dynamic, organic religion governing all aspects of life at all levels of the individual, society and the state. It should be open and understandable to all, not just a sheltered and distant community of scholars. Al-Azhar and the Muslim world are symbiotically linked and when al-Azhar 'went to sleep' the *umma* followed.¹⁵⁹ In short Islam, according to al-Banna, should be a living, inclusive, all-encompassing way of life, not a privatised, exclusive faith. Al-Azhar ought to play a positive role encouraging the Brotherhood's vision, rather than reactively supporting the political and social *status quo*. Not only had al-Azhar failed Islam as a historical project, but crucially it had abandoned and

¹⁵⁶ Sayed Farid Alatas "From *Jami'ah* to University: Multiculturalism and Christian-Muslim Dialogue"

¹⁵⁷ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.212

¹⁵⁸ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.213

¹⁵⁹ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.213

become irrelevant to the living Muslim community. According to the Muslim Brothers al-Azhar, as the bastion of Islamic learning, had two major roles to play, and it had failed in both. Firstly, al-Azhar should be the 'leading voice of Muslims in the world ... and a spokesman for a living and dynamic Islam.'¹⁶⁰ Secondly, Al-Azhar should defend against encroachments on Islam from alien ideas and ideals. Al-Azhar had achieved this second task by withdrawing ever further into an anachronistic Islam, whilst living Islam, as the Brotherhood construed it, had been invaded, eroded and colonised by foreign values. By failing to involve itself in the wider Muslim community al-Azhar had relinquished its moral and intellectual authority in Egypt and the *umma*.

Despite the Brothers' contempt for it, al-Banna was careful not to publically ostracize the university; its students were important targets for Muslim Brotherhood membership, and al-Banna did not want to alienate them or the rest of institutionalized Islam. For the ordinary Muslim al-Azhar as an institution still held great symbolic value and encapsulated a long, proud Islamic history and tradition. The Brothers, therefore critiqued the 'type' of Islam that al-Azhar had come to embody; a submissive, moribund Islam incapable of defending itself from foreign ideologies. Al-Azhar was partly the cause, but also partly the symptom and outcome of an impotent Islam.

Furthermore, al-Banna could not see how change could be affected by the traditional centres of Islam. The imperialists had a critical interest in maintaining the *status quo* of a weakened, privatised Islam. To complete the circle the *ulema*, many of whom were major landowners, were likely to lose out in the event of major political upheaval, and the rectors at al-Azhar were happy to receive funding and a degree of autonomy, in exchange for political acquiescence. In this servile state Islam could not be used as a tool of resistance or rebellion, nor would it be an effective rallying cry around which politically diverse Muslim groups could unite and upset the balance of power. In fact a corrupt and enfeebled Islam served to divide Muslims who, unable to see Islam as an all-encompassing unity, split up into religious subsets, and concentrated on their differences rendering them incapable of uniting against their common enemy—the imperialists and Western materialism.

¹⁶⁰ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.212

2.4.10 Law

It is not surprising that one of al-Banna's key aims was the removal of Western, secular law from Egypt and its replacement with divine *shar'ia*. There were good, theological grounds for this position, but in the context of early twentieth century Egypt there were other, more immediate concerns. As with politics, education, cultural life and economics, al-Banna was acutely aware of the dualisms of the Egyptian legal system. To understand how these dualisms arose in Egypt we must briefly examine the history of the legal system in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt.

The Capitulations were a set of commercial treaties entered into by the Ottoman sultans with European states. The Ottoman sultans entered into these agreements from a position of military superiority over Europe and they were intended to facilitate commercial trade. The first treaty was with France in 1536 permitting 'French merchants to trade freely in Ottoman ports, to be exempt from Ottoman taxes and to import and export goods at low tariff rates.'¹⁶¹ A further series of similar treaties eventually tilted economic power in Europe's favour and facilitated the penetration of European goods and capital into the Ottoman Empire. These economic agreements also had political significance as they granted foreign merchants immunity from Ottoman law and placed them under the jurisdiction of the relevant European consul. As the balance of economic and political power shifted away from the Ottoman Empire, European consuls frequently and brazenly exploited the legal powers granted in the Capitulations causing humiliation for the Ottoman sovereign. By the nineteenth century the Capitulations symbolized the weakness and impotence of the Ottomans and the economic and political dominance of the Europeans, a dominance that they were willing to exploit openly regardless of the destabilising effect on the Ottoman Empire.

One consequence of the increasing number of foreigners conducting business in Egypt was that the legal system needed to be adapted to cope with disputes arising between them and the locals. The Capitulations had provided legal protection for foreign traders from the indigenous legal system and traditionally any dispute between Egyptians and foreigners would be heard by the relevant European consul, which would normally result in the exoneration of the foreigner no matter how egregious their offence. As the number of cases

¹⁶¹ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.50

increased it became clear that this confusing and biased legal system needed to be standardized. Under the European-orientated reforms of Isma'il in 1876 the Mixed Courts were established to address this problem. They were to preside over cases involving civil and commercial disputes where foreigners were involved. The courts were governed by French civil law and were staffed by judges who served for life, thus lending the courts a degree of political autonomy. Once the Mixed Courts were established it was not long before the Egyptian legal system was further reformed, standardized and centralized. The National Courts, based closely on the Mixed Courts were created in 1884. The National Courts jurisdiction covered all Egyptians in matters of civil and commercial law and was based on the French legal code. Furthermore, although Egyptians could serve as judges, Europeans tended to be preferred for the most important positions.¹⁶²

The creation of the Mixed and National Courts centralized and standardized the Egyptian legal system, but it was also dominated by European judges and was based on European law. The *shar'ia* courts had their jurisdiction severely curtailed and only dealt with personal and family matters, such as divorce, and so restricted the legal responsibilities and power of the ulema. Cleveland notes that at the same time as *shar'ia* was marginalized to essentially private matters and the ulema's authority limited, opportunities arose for Egyptians schooled in French law; '[t]hus was Egyptian society set in conflict with itself.'¹⁶³ Clearly, any Muslim society that lived under any non-Islamic law would fail the standard of God's absolute sovereignty by living according to a man-made, and therefore profane law, thus the exclusive implementation of *shar'ia* was a critical goal. The achievement of this goal was, however, necessary but not sufficient. The totality of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology was distinctly utopian in orientation due to this absolute goal of unity and this would eventually lead to the splintering of the group into political realists willing to compromise on the concept of *tawhid* and those that could not.

2.4.11 Secularism

Closely connected with the Brothers' views of the legal system was their critique of secularism. The culmination of the *tawhid-fitna* principle was the absolute rejection of the principle of secularism. The division of religious and political authority was the antithesis of

¹⁶² William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.97

¹⁶³ William L. Cleveland *A History of the Modern Middle East* p.97

the ideal of *tawhid* and the embodiment of *fitna*.¹⁶⁴ For al-Banna secularism was not just one more corrupt Western ideal, but the false idol that the West was enthralled to. Secularism did not merely threaten the cohesiveness of Egyptian society; it held within it the seed of the destruction of Islam. In his fundamental and total rejection of secularism al-Banna was following a well-worn ideological path by the Pakistani journalist and political theorist Mawlana Mawdudi.¹⁶⁵ Writing in the late 1920s Mawdudi argued against the circumscribed ‘Muslim State,’ a state for Muslims, analogous to the ‘Jewish state’ of the Balfour Declaration.¹⁶⁶ For Mawdudi anything short of an Islamic state would concede unacceptable ground to the nationalists by placing manmade laws and politics above the divine law and the sovereignty of Allah. In contrast to the Brotherhood’s grassroots action and early avoidance of politics, Mawdudi proposed ‘Islamization from above,’ where ‘sovereignty would be exercised in the name of Allah’ in accordance with *shar’ia*. ‘Politics,’ declared Mawdudi, ‘was “an integral, inseparable part of the Islamic faith, and ... [in the] Islamic state ... Muslim political action seeks to build ... a panacea for all their problems.”’¹⁶⁷ Clearly, any form of secularism was absolutely incompatible with Mawdudi’s vision of an Islamic state.

The early Islamist’s rejection of secularism may appear as a regressive and dogmatic principle. It is important to note, however, that the reverse is also true; from the perspective of Mawdudi, al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood, secularism stood as a Western idol that they refused to worship, and vowed to destroy. Rather than regarding secularism as a political philosophy it was seen as an assertion of a blasphemous faith in manmade law and politics. These were not two positions that could be reconciled through negotiation, compromise and rational argument. Karen Armstrong dramatically observes: ‘fundamentalism exists in a symbiotic relationship with an aggressive liberalism or secularism, and, under attack, invariably becomes more extreme, bitter, and excessive.’¹⁶⁸ Armstrong then goes on to claim ‘[the] doctrine of God’s sovereignty ... threw down a gauntlet to the modern world because it contradicted every one of its sacred truths.’¹⁶⁹ The word ‘sacred’ illustrates the symmetry of the two positions and thus the impossibility of conciliation. This symmetry was not something inherent in the two philosophies—the philosophical basis of secularism and

¹⁶⁴ Bernard Lewis *The Political Language of Islam* p.3

¹⁶⁵ Born in India in 1903 Mawlana Mawdudi formed the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Party of Islam) that played an important role in the partition of India and the founding of Pakistan.

¹⁶⁶ Mawlana Mawdudi cited in Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.35

¹⁶⁷ Mawlana Mawdudi cited in Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.34

¹⁶⁸ Karen Armstrong *The Battle For God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* p.178

¹⁶⁹ Karen Armstrong *The Battle For God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* p.237

Islamism are quite different in form and content—but reflects the appearance of the other from their respective positions. The Islamists firmly believed that sovereignty was Allah's alone, and humans had no right to create their own laws or the shape their destiny. This was a clear rejection of the foundations of secularism and its declaration of human freedom and autonomy. Mawdudi exemplifies this stance and the gulf between Islamism and secularism when he writes:

It is neither for us to decide the aim and purpose of our existence or to prescribe the limits in [sic] our worldly authority nor is anyone else entitled to make these decisions for us. This right [is] vest[ed] only in God Who has created us endowed us with mental and physical faculties, and provided all material provisions for our use. This principle of the Oneness of God altogether negates the concept of the legal and political sovereignty of human beings, individually or collectively. Nothing can claim sovereignty, be it a human being, a family, a class or group of people, or even the human race in the world as a whole. God alone is the Sovereign and His Commandments are the Law of Islam.¹⁷⁰

In order to understand the Brothers' vitriolic rejection of secularism we must recall the unity of al-Banna's ideology and its theme of unification both in its critique and its solution exemplified in the motif of *tawhid*. For al-Banna the problems facing Egyptian society and the wider *umma* could not be viewed separately, and certainly could not be tackled one at a time. The idea of secularism was not understood merely as a political doctrine of the separation of Church and State, but as an all-corrupting philosophy that threatened to tear the *umma* apart and destroy Islam. The dualisms of the West—with the duality of secularism at its centre—were poisonous for Muslims.

Perhaps, more than any other feature of the Islamist ideology, this chasm of understanding between the principle of *tawhid* and secularism, explains the radical divergence and persistent hostility between Islamists and secular governments. Furthermore, this also helps explain the apparent gulf of understanding between Western observers, either lay or academic, and the Islamists. Within a secularist worldview the Islamist ideology and its deep foundations in the principle of *tawhid* seems strange to the Western social scientist leading to the temptation to grope for alternative motivations lying behind the religious 'facade.' John Voll comments that 'religious religious belief ... [is explained] as a secondary phenomenon related to "real" motivations involving material gain, class interest, or other non-religious aspects of human

¹⁷⁰ Mawlana Mawdudi *The Islamic Way of Life*

experience.¹⁷¹ For the Islamists to be properly understood it is necessary to take the religious kernel of their ideology seriously and not to superimpose a secularist framework operating behind the Islamist rhetoric.

2.4.12 The Muslim Brotherhood's Ideological Solution

So far we have examined how al-Banna constructed the Islamist ideology based on a critique of modernity and the failure of orthodox Islamic authorities to respond. As discussed in the first chapter ideologies do more than just provide an explanation of the world to its adherents, and their place within it, but also to provide a vision of a new future. For the Muslim Brothers the division of labour was very much imbalanced in favour of the critique rather than the positive vision or solution. This was a result of the ideology's embodiment in a real movement that had to ensure its survival in a turbulent social and political situation dominated by far more powerful forces. The imbalance was reinforced by al-Banna's natural fear of premature action. As we have seen with the Brotherhood conferences talk of action was mostly rhetoric, and when it did finally tip over into violence the Society was too weak to survive the government's repression. This would be a recurring problem for Islamist movements who found themselves in the position of being too weak to seize power but too strong to be tolerated. This may also be one of the reasons why Islamist movements have tended to resort to a mode of action—terrorism—and a covert organisational structure that can withstand state repression. Despite these difficulties the Islamist ideology at this stage did have something to say about a solution to the problems it describes, and we shall briefly examine this now.

The final goal of al-Banna's project remained necessarily vague and was described in a broad, utopian language.¹⁷² The aims of the Brotherhood were presented as a unique solution to the problems of Egyptian society and the cures prescribed by the Brothers were closely related to the ills they had diagnosed. As we have seen al-Banna believed that Egyptian society had been corrupted, 'under the impact of western civilization ... materialist philosophy, and *franji* [foreign] traditions.'¹⁷³ These alien influences had thoroughly corrupted every area of life, including Egyptian society's culture, economy, politics, personal

¹⁷¹ John Voll "Foreword" in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* xii

¹⁷² Youssef M. Choueiri *Islamic Fundamentalism* p.43

¹⁷³ Hasan al-Banna cited in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.6

conduct, religious practice, and the legal system. In contrast to other nationalist reformers of the day, Al-Banna held that the core cause of these multiple corruptions was the corruption of the nation's, and in particular the youth's, Islamic faith. The only way to repair these deep problems would be a total Islamic reformation of Muslim individuals, society and the nation.

The specifics of what exactly a total Islamic reformation would entail were both contentious and vague. This resulted in a superficial consensus consisting of rhetorical slogans: "the Qur'an is our constitution," and a cluster of abstract principles. These basic principles encapsulated a *de facto* definition of Islam for the Muslim Brotherhood. They were 'the insistence on (1) Islam as a total system, complete unto itself, and the final arbiter of life in all its categories; (2) an Islam formulated from and based on its two primary sources, the revelation in the Qur'an and the wisdom of the Prophet in the Sunna; and (3) an Islam applicable to all times and to all places.'¹⁷⁴ These basic principles demonstrate the importance to al-Banna of Islam representing a total, perfect and timeless panacea to the endemic problems he diagnosed in Egyptian society. The second principle reflects the specific influence of the *salafi* movement on al-Banna and the Brotherhood as it emphasizes a return to the pristine, unsullied version of Islam based around the Qur'an and the Sunna.

The incompleteness of al-Banna's vision of the end-product of an Islamic revival was compounded by the ideological battles fought over how this could be achieved. In the early years of the Brotherhood al-Banna believed that the process of reform flowed from the individual through to society and the state. For genuine reform to be realized individual Muslims must first discard their 'doubt and perplexity,' and embrace the truth and practice of the Brothers version of a genuine Islamic life.¹⁷⁵ Al-Banna was a primary school teacher throughout his leadership of the Brotherhood and firmly believed in the role of education in the moral and religious reform of the individual and in particular the necessity of re-educating the Egyptian youth. The reform of young people was paramount as they were the most vulnerable to the competing ideological influences of Western materialism, nationalism and communism. Mitchell describes al-Banna's 'mission in life as the reversal of these trends; he would become 'a counsellor and a teacher,' giving himself, by day to the children and by

¹⁷⁴ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.14

¹⁷⁵ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.6

night to their parents, to the task of teaching 'the objectives of religion and the sources of their well-being and happiness in life.'¹⁷⁶

A consequence of this view was the importance attached to the concept of *jihad* by the Brothers. The incorporation of *jihad* into the Islamist lexicon has a history that is closely intertwined with the evolution of the Islamist ideology. For the Society of Muslim Brothers *jihad* was primarily utilized as a general exhortation to action, reflecting its literal translation: struggle or effort. In response to the apathetic lethargy diagnosed by al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood prescribed a spiritual, political and physical awakening for Egyptian Muslims. All self-initiated activities aimed at furthering the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood were collected under the banner of *jihad*. The abstract imperative of *jihad* however, can be further broken down into three overlapping categories of more specific activism.

The first of these categories of *jihad* was the anti-colonial struggle to rid Egypt of British influence. This was not, however, a straightforward task. Al-Banna recognised that in order for the Muslim Brothers to survive they must accomplish a *modus vivendi* with the Egyptian authorities during a period when Islamic organizations were banned if suspected of engaging in politics. For a long period al-Banna thought that this accommodationist stance could be a permanent state-of-affairs and was based in the ideological position that it was possible for individuals to possess multiple identities and loyalties—for example Islamic and Egyptian-nationalist. As the group grew larger and more self-confident, their rhetoric sharpened and explicitly anti-British statements were sanctioned by the leadership. For most of their history, however, the Muslim Brothers did not engage in political violence, a policy that led to frustration and the formation of a radical splinter group, Muhammad's Youth.¹⁷⁷ The schism between the predominantly non-violent parent organization and its militant, underground offspring mirrors the split between modern 'moderate' Islamists and their violent counterparts. Just like the modern distinction, the division within the Muslim Brothers was not clear-cut; a violent arm, the Secret Apparatus, was formed during the Second World War, with the intention of capitalising on the post-war confusion and achieve the group's anti-British objectives. Despite this, the leadership continued to disown the use of violence and the coordination and the extent of the Society's post-war violence remains unclear.

¹⁷⁶ Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* p.6

¹⁷⁷ Brynjar Lia *The Society of Muslim Brothers In Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* p.250

The second type of *jihad* was for the Islamists to seize power in Egypt. This was a far more controversial objective than getting rid of the British—a cause that united almost all Egyptians of any ideological persuasion. Recognising how dangerous this idea was al-Banna sought at first to deny that the Brotherhood was a political organization, and later when this became untenable he denied that the Brothers would resort to violence against the Egyptian state. This *jihad* was marked by both its lack of clear, achievable objectives and the vagueness of the final goal. Although al-Banna created a military section a clear strategy was never formulated.¹⁷⁸ The lack of commitment to seizing power through violent means was matched by al-Banna's half-hearted engagement with the political process. Despite al-Banna's reticence the internal logic of the ideology meant that the seizure of domestic power was the only realistic way of achieving an Islamic state. As we saw with the historical development of the Society the vacillation between the imperative of *jihad* and pragmatic survival eventually caused schisms within the movement and made it vulnerable to the whims of the state.¹⁷⁹

The least developed and third category of *jihad* imagined the spreading of the Brotherhood across the *umma* eventually resulting in the reestablishment of the caliphate and the triumph of Islam over the Christian West. The Brothers were too weak to develop this idea beyond mere utopian dreaming but there are some indications that this type of thinking did exist in the movement. New autonomous branches of the Society were created in surrounding Arab region demonstrating an attempt to spread beyond Egyptian borders. Furthermore, the one significant example of the Battalion system in action was during the 1948 Palestine war. Despite this the restraints of the existing movement meant that this radical element of the ideology was not developed during al-Banna's time. It took the destruction of the movement and the unleashing of the ideology from pragmatic constraints for it to undergo the next step in its evolution. It is to this stage that we now turn.

¹⁷⁸ Youssef M. Choueiri *Islamic Fundamentalism* p.42

¹⁷⁹ Youssef M. Choueiri *Islamic Fundamentalism* p.42

3 The Radicalisation of the Islamist Ideology

3.1 Introduction

After Nasser's 1952 revolution and the proscription of the Muslim Brotherhood both the movement and the ideology underwent a period of adaptive evolution. This was a result of the altered political reality in which the movement found itself and the injection of new ideas from new intellectuals. By critically tracking the evolution of these ideas in their historical and intellectual context we aim to understand the form of the Islamist ideology during this crucial period.

We begin by surveying the new political, social and material landscape that the Brothers found themselves in following the revolution. We will then turn our attention to the most important ideologue to emerge during this period—and for subsequent Islamist movements in the late 20th century—Sayyid Qutb. Although involved with the Brothers later in his life, Qutb was not a product of the movement and so it will be useful to examine his life in order to better understand the new direction that he took with the Islamist ideology. Sayyid Qutb marked both a departure and a continuation of the ideological trends of the al-Banna and early Muslim Brotherhood period. It will also be instructive to scrutinize the similarities and differences between al-Banna and Qutb; and demonstrate how these differences informed the evolution of the Islamist ideology in the 1960s and 70s. Qutb introduced several crucial new concepts that profoundly shaped the direction of Islamist movements after his death so we shall examine the most important of these in detail. Another important element of Qutb's thinking was his dialectical accounts of Western materialism, communism and the three monotheistic religions. These sub-narratives are then woven together into the grand dialectical narrative of Islam and *jahiliyya* (ignorance of Islam). We will study these ideas in order to understand Qutb and the late modern Islamist ideology with its transcendental characteristics.¹ We will look at how Qutb thought his theory could be put into practice by looking at his treatment of *jihad*, the Islamic Revolution and the Muslim nation. Finally we shall compare Qutb's notion of action with that of al-Banna.

¹ By 'transcendental' we refer not to the technical philosophical sense of the word but the idea that the Islamist ideology operates beyond mundane reality.

In the previous chapter we observed how the theory and practice of the movement and the Islamist ideology interacted and mutually restrained their development. This was observed both in the tension present in al-Banna's writings and leadership, and in the centrifugal forces in the Society that eventually resulted in its bifurcation. The restriction that practice exerted over the theory was particularly in evidence in the stunted growth of the utopian element of the ideology that found itself incapable of fleshing out its aspirations for the future of the Islamist movement for fear of the immediate material and political damage that could result. By contrast one interesting feature of the Qutbian period is that theory and practice became effectively detached as Qutb was writing largely in isolation from the movement in prison. As we shall argue this temporary distancing of the two elements and the elevation of the importance of theory over practice largely accounts for the radical and utopian direction the ideology took on during this period and for the trajectory of the ideology into the 21st century.

3.1.1 The Muslim Brothers in post-Revolution Egypt

The history of the decline of the original Muslim Brotherhood reveals some important insights into the Islamist ideology. As a proscribed organization the Brotherhood and the Islamist ideology underwent a further stage in its evolution. The physical relocation of many members into prisons and internment camps in the Sinai desert, and the persecution of other Brothers, meant that the Society was transformed from one embedded within Egyptian society to one excluded from it. The Society had existed as a living organization, forced to deal with the mundane political, social and material realities of everyday Egypt. Its ideology was developed by Hasan al-Banna and other key leaders but it was always restrained and shaped by the opinions, ideas and activities of the members. Prior to 1954 the ideology of al-Banna and other leading Brothers had existed in a dynamic relationship with the actual organization. The ideology had shaped the Society and guided its development and eventual downfall, but in turn the Society exerted a power over the ideology and fashioned its form. This power was primarily one of constraint, we have already examined how al-Banna had to restrict the third stage of the ideology—that of action or revolution—because of his perception of the limited power of the Brothers, and his own cautious preference for preparation over execution.

The same tensions between the ideology and the organization, or theory and practice, can be observed in the internal rift caused by the Secret Apparatus. Here the political violence inherent in the ideology that for pragmatic reasons could not be expressed openly in action had to be subverted into an underground movement that was simultaneously part of the Society and autonomous. Eventually the contradictions between theory and practice created centrifugal forces that tore the Society apart and contributed to its downfall—the mass movement could not contain the explosive utopian impulses of the ideology. The tensions between the radical, utopian aspirations inherent in the structure of the Islamist ideology could not ultimately be contained by al-Banna's pragmatic conservatism. Neither the members of the organization, nor the ideology of the Society, were infinitely flexible as demonstrated by the radical breakaway group—the Society of Our Master Mohammed's Youth. In this case the ambitions and frustrations of a section of members could not be placated within the scope of the ideology, nor could the movement be stretched to accommodate the Brothers' concerns and so a fundamental break had to occur.

The post-revolution period saw the movement crossing the threshold of legality to illegality and the corresponding shift from a *modus operandi* of principally legal, non-violent methods to illegal violent ones. The loss of an authoritative centralized core that could exert a measure of control over the actions of the members meant that the more wild impulses—that had always been present—could now be expressed. From the Society's inception in 1928 to 1954 the spectre of repression and dismantlement of the organization meant that there was always the possibility of suffering a great loss, and this restrained their scope of action. Once the Society had been destroyed as an organization the potential for destruction had been removed and so the disincentive against violent actions was removed.

Nasser's suppression of the Brothers also resulted in their physical removal from society and their concentration in prison camps.² The distillation of the most dangerous, committed and idealistic Brothers had the opposite effect intended by Nasser. These men coalesced into a myriad of small, self-contained groups that, in the harsh isolation of prison, were both physically and psychologically removed from the complexities of Egyptian society and politics.³ A further effect of removal was the diminishing of the feeling of connectedness with the outside world; the political prisoners felt they had no stake in society. Removed from

² Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.63

³ John Voll "Foreword" in Richard Mitchell *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* x

the messy complexity of society it was easy for the most committed Brothers to re-conceptualize society in black and white, to bifurcate the world into the true believers and the *kafir* (apostates) or, as we shall see, into a true understanding of Islam and *jahiliyya*.⁴ The tether of the organization that had restricted the development of the ideology was cut free: it was now free to evolve in any direction its intellectuals would care to take it. The pragmatism that had restrained al-Banna's construction of the Islamist ideology had no traction here. Instead an idealistic, transcendental, revolutionary and utopian philosophy had a receptive audience and it was the writings of a fellow prisoner, Sayyid Qutb that quenched this thirst.

3.1.2 Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966)

Sayyid Qutb's upbringing shared some similarities with Hasan al-Banna. Brought up in Mushsa, a small village 200 miles south of Cairo, he experienced the same shift from the traditional elementary Qur'anic school, where he learnt the Qur'an by heart, to a secular, modern school. He was struck by the contrast in the educational system between tradition and backwardness of the Egyptian religious madrassas with the modernity of forward-thinking Western-oriented secular schools and the constant tension between the two camps. His family were prominent in the village and so Qutb, as the only surviving son, received an effectively private education. Thus by the time that he left for Cairo, Qutb was a highly literate teenager, and having experienced the 1919 Wafdist revolution, he was also conscious of Egyptian nationalist politics.

After moving to Cairo in the early 1920s he faced the same tensions but in an unfamiliar urban setting. 'Qutb,' comments one biographer, 'was the product of two worlds, traditional and modern, which eventually merged into one unstable world with two conflicting worldviews.'⁵ Here he enrolled in a teacher training school before transferring to college and finally graduating with a BA in education in 1933. During this period Qutb began writing poetry and essays, some of which were published in Cairo's literary journals, and started to mix in Cairo's literary circles. After graduation he worked for the Ministry of Public Instruction drafting articles on educational reform. His main preoccupation during the next few years was his deepening involvement with Cairo's literati and he led a life as 'a man of

⁴ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* pp.207-208

⁵ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.28

letters, a social critic, and a journalist.’⁶ He also joined the Wafd and became a committed activist which informed his essentially secular, liberal-nationalist political outlook.

In the early period of his writing Qutb rebelled against the established Cairo school of poetry, escaping outside the confines of traditional Arabic literature to acquaint himself with not only Western literature but with the entire gamut of modern knowledge: ‘psychology, psychoanalysis, ... biology, Darwinism, chemistry, Einstein ..., the structure of the universe ... as well as modern scientific and philosophical theories.’⁷ Qutb attempted to transform himself into a polymath and increasingly became aware of the tension between the rich but ossified heritage of the East and the dynamic but hollow modernism of the West. Although Qutb was clearly fascinated with the idea of modernity and the West during this period it was not an unambiguous relationship but one of ‘morbid fascination,’ reflected in the restless, gloomy introspection of his poetry.⁸ Eventually the internalized, self-doubting, depressed poetry gave way to a growing political awareness and his output switched from poetry to literary criticism that also marked a shift from abstract matters of the heart towards topics of social justice and nationalist politics. This coincided with the Palestine-Arab revolt from 1936 to 1939 and the political turbulence in the build-up to the Second World War where resentment in the failure of the nationalist Wafdist project to achieve full independence resulted in widespread social discontent, publically expressed anti-Westernism and a dramatic rise in the popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood.

As Qutb reorientated his writings around these themes he also began to rediscover the Qur’an of his childhood. At first he approached it from a literary perspective in an attempt to apply the tools of literary criticism to explicate the intricacies and beauty of the text. However, at the commencement of war in 1939 Qutb became entirely disillusioned with the liberal nationalist ideals that had informed his writings for the previous decade. In the social economic and political upheavals caused by the war in Egypt and the spectacle of destruction as the various secular ideologies of the West plunged the world into chaos Qutb began to forge an idea of social justice based on the principles of Islam. This project that Qutb would pursue to his execution in 1966 was influenced by the ideas of Mawdudi, al-Banna and the

⁶ Albert J. Bergesen *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society* p.3

⁷ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.36

⁸ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.38

Muslim Brothers with whom he had forged contacts but did not officially join until the early 1950s.

Two formative events had a critical influence on Qutb's 'emergence as a stern moralist, [and] an anti-Western thinker.'⁹ The first was the nihilistic violence that he observed during the Second World War; the second, his state-sponsored trip to America. Qutb viewed the war as the climax of the inherent violence contained in Western materialism which he called 'the tribulation of humanity.'¹⁰ More specifically he condemned Western suppression of Arab nationalist movements, citing in particular the history of French and British colonialism in Egypt and Western support for Zionism. Under the hypocritical mask of a civilizing power colonialism is nothing but 'savage barbarism.'¹¹ The war, thus viewed, was caused by mounting social, political, economic and moral crises created by the contradictions of materialism. These forces culminated in the unmasking of the West and resulted in an explosive orgy of violence as Western technologies and expertise in mass production were harnessed as instruments of mutual and total destruction.

3.1.3 Qutb in America

The second, more personal event was Qutb's visit to America from 1948 to 1950. The Egyptian Ministry of Education sponsored him to observe and report back on the American educational system. Broadly speaking the Second World War and the history of colonialism informed Qutb's ideas of the political violence inherent in Western materialism but it was his firsthand experiences during his stay in America from which he developed his views on the moral bankruptcy of the West. This period of Qutb's life, and his reaction to sexual promiscuity, consumerism, alcohol consumption, the power of the mass media and capitalism has been widely discussed but it is worth noting one particularly interesting experience that affected his writings.¹² After attending a church service the young male and female worshippers were led to an adjoining room where a mixed dance was held. Qutb found this mixing of religion, entertainment and sexual fraternising particularly vile by debasing

⁹ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.73

¹⁰ Sayyid Qutb cited in Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.84

¹¹ Sayyid Qutb cited in Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.84

¹² See Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*

religion into a mere adjunct to 'having a good time.'¹³ Qutb believed that everything corrupt and distasteful he found in America was all part of the same problem and was rooted in the secular materialist philosophy. In this way he collected together the vices of sexual openness and promiscuity, with popular culture, music and film, racism, and capitalism into a self-perpetuating, hedonistic and dystopic vision of modernity:

Humanity today is living in a large brothel! One has only to glance at its press, films, fashion shows, beauty contests, ballrooms, wine bars, and broadcasting stations! Or observe its mad lust for naked flesh, provocative postures, and sick, suggestive statements in literature, the arts and the mass media! And add to all this, the system of usury which fuels man's voracity for money and engenders vile methods for its accumulation and investment, in addition to fraud, trickery, and blackmail dressed up in the garb of the law.¹⁴

Qutb believed that people in the West, under the influence of a hegemonic materialism, had become estranged from themselves—by living in contradiction with human nature; other humans—through moral and social decay; and God—through secularisation and neglect of religious practice. In a letter he wrote to Mawlana Mawdudi he complained '[h]ere is alienation, the real alienation, the alienation of the spirit and the body, here in that huge workshop which they call the New World.'¹⁵ The alienation that Qutb diagnosed in modern Western societies is in part a reflection of Qutb's own deeply felt personal experience of alienation as an Arab in mid-century America. In one revealing passage in *Milestones* Qutb expresses the loneliness, spiritual and moral aloofness of a 'Believer' in the midst of a materialist society:

The society may be drowned in lusts, steeped in low passions, rolling in filth and dirt, thinking that it has enjoyment and freedom from chains and restrictions. ... The Believer from his height looks at the people drowning in dirt and mud. He may be the only one; yet he is not dejected nor grieved, nor does his heart desire that he take off his neat and immaculate garments and join the crowd.¹⁶

3.1.4 Return to Egypt

¹³ Sayyid Qutb cited in Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.116

¹⁴ Sayyid Qutb cited in Karen Armstrong *The Battle For God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* p.240

¹⁵ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.118

¹⁶ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* pp.145-146

In 1949, during Qutb's stay in America, Hasan al-Banna was assassinated in Egypt. Although he did not know al-Banna well Qutb was angered by the sense of glee that he detected in the reporting of his death in the American press. What had previously been disgust and contempt towards American culture was now also coloured by enmity. It seemed to him that the idea of a popular Islamist movement threatened the West which explained the barely veiled delight with which the news of the decapitation and suppression of the Brothers was greeted. Before leaving Qutb published a book, *Social Justice in Islam* that explicated his newly developing Islamist orientation. In the dedication he praised the 'youngsters whom I see ... coming to restore this religion anew as it began fighting in the cause of Allah by killing and getting killed.'¹⁷ Although he later denied it, many Brothers back in Egypt assumed that he was implicitly referring to them; in any case the dedication opened the way for an emerging closeness between the Society and Qutb upon his return.

In the years following the Second World War the moment of calm in the wake of the violence subsided, replaced by the tense struggle for power between Western liberal democracies and the communist bloc. This new paradigm of international relations framed Qutb's ideological response. In several papers and short books published between 1950 and 1952 Qutb argued that the Muslim world should not align itself with one bloc or the other for political or economic gain, nor follow a policy of neutral non-alignment, but instead should actively embrace Islam as a superior political system and ideology to the corrupt man-made systems of communism and capitalism. At this point there was an element of *realpolitik* in Qutb's thinking; he identified the potential strength of a Muslim political bloc that he claimed would stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific and encompass 300 million Muslims.

To make sense of the transformations in Qutb's ideas we can roughly divide his intellectual life into three periods. The first was his career in the education ministry and his alternative existence as a literary critic. During this time Qutb had an essentially modern, secular and nationalist outlook and engaged in a literary rebellion against the conservative establishment. The second period saw his poetry output being replaced by essays on themes of social justice, during this time he also rediscovered the Qur'an, first as a literary text and later as the key to answering all the social, political and economic problems of the Muslim world. During this time he also developed a fiercely anti-Western attitude through his experience of Egypt in the

¹⁷ Sayyid Qutb cited in Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.122

War and then from his personal observations on his stay in America.¹⁸ The third period, to which we now turn, saw Qutb witnessing the failure of pan-Islamism to materialise as a political reality and the restrained pragmatism of his writings of the early 1950s gave way to a radical utopianism.

3.1.5 Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood

During the third period Qutb was drawn into the orbit of the Muslim Brothers (or, from an alternative perspective the Brotherhood was drawn towards Qutb). Initially Qutb began to have his articles published in the Society's journals, and then later, after being impressed with the guerrilla campaign fought by the Brothers against the British in the Suez Canal crises, he joined as a member in 1951. Soon after the ideologies of Qutb and the Brothers began to align and Qutb became the 'leading ideologue' of the Society and the head of the 'Propagation of the Message Section' in 1953.¹⁹

The fate of the Qutb and the Brothers from 1952 onwards was tied in with that of the Free Officers revolution of July that year. Both the Society and Qutb personally were close to the Free Officers and the Brothers regarded the *coup* as 'our revolution.'²⁰ After the *coup* the Revolutionary Control Council (RCC) rescinded the laws that proscribed the Brothers as an illegitimate organisation. The initial solidarity and gestures of political cooperation between the RCC and the Society however, descended into mutual antagonism as it emerged that the Brothers' vision of a government based entirely run on the principles of Islam did not coincide with the RCC's long-term nationalist vision for the country. As tension between the groups grew Qutb was forced to choose sides. In 1952, frustrated by his failure to secure promotion to Minister of Education he submitted his letter of resignation. The simmering hostility broke out into the open in 1954 during a student rally that turned violent resulting in clashes between the young student Brothers and pro-government supporters. The RCC seized on this incident as the pretext to designate the Society as a political party and declared it illegal under a revolutionary law.

¹⁸ Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri "Contextualising Neo-Islamism" p.9

¹⁹ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* pp.130-136

²⁰ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.137

In the meantime the power struggle climaxed between President Mohammed Naguib, who wished to return the country from a military dictatorship to a constitutional parliamentary system encompassing the Wafd and the Brothers, and Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, who wanted the armed forces to remain at the centre of power. Nasser eventually gained the upper hand ensuring that reconciliation between the state and the Brothers would be impossible. The final act arrived during a public address by Nasser held on October 26th, 1954. Captured and immortalised in a radio recording Nasser's speech was interrupted by a volley of bullets in an assassination attempt by a Muslim Brotherhood secret apparatus cell. Moments after the shots were fired Nasser delivered an improvised rebuttal:

... I am Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser ... I redeem you with my blood. I shall live for you and die working for you. ... So let them kill me now. ... I have planted in this nation freedom, dignity and self-respect. For the sake of Egypt and for the sake of the freedom of Egypt I shall live; and I shall die for the sake of Egypt.²¹

The vitriolic rhetoric was swiftly followed by the crushing of the Society as a political organization. Al-Banna's successor al-Hudaybi was imprisoned and several of the other leaders were found guilty of leading a conspiracy for the overthrow of the RCC and were executed. Many other ordinary members were arrested and imprisoned including Qutb. He would spend the next ten years incarcerated and tortured in Egypt's prisons. It is in this setting of persecution and isolation that Qutb produced his most radical texts.

3.2 Qutb's Worldview

To grasp Qutb's philosophy we need to examine how he understood the contemporary world and its history. In his writings Qutb described a novel worldview that interpreted history as a battle between *jahiliyya* and Islam. Clearly influenced by Marx's historic materialism, Qutb describes history as a dialectic between the forces of ignorance—*jahiliyya*—and the immutable truth of Islam. Instead of the relations of production as the base that determines consciousness, social and political structures, and ideology, Qutb places truth and falsehood as the real foundation upon which the superstructure rests. Both Qutbian and Marxist ideology are teleological and utopian: Marx identified the communist means of production as the final economic base, upon which a classless, stateless and non-ideological society would

²¹ Gamal Abdel Nasser cited in Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* p.144

be supported, whilst Qutb stated that only when Islam reigns supreme would a truly just society be created, one where there would be 'no strife on earth and all submission be made to God alone.'²²

3.2.1 Jahiliyya

The concept of *jahiliyya* is central to Qutb's philosophy. Traditionally it pejoratively described the state of Arabian tribes prior to the revelation of Islam. During this period the tribes lived in a state of ignorance and so existed in a primitive state of quasi-anarchy and constant internecine war and blood feuds. Their ignorance was several fold: firstly, they did not recognise a singular God, instead worshiping a multitude of idols. Secondly, their ignorance of the monotheistic revealed truth meant that there was widespread moral ignorance most dramatically displayed in the practice of infanticide. Finally, there was political ignorance that resulted in never-ending warring between the tribes and an economic system that relied on the belligerent and reciprocal practice of raiding caravans. In short their ignorance of God led to ignorance of how to organize society which resulted in an unjust, immoral, chaotic and weak society marked by strife, war and human misery and suffering.²³

Qutb mined the rich concept of *jahiliyya* to understand and critique the modern world. He was not merely using the term to label modern societies as ignorant, unjust and chaotic, but was pursuing a more fundamental line of critique. In his most famous work *Milestones* Qutb developed at length the argument that all societies—including Muslim ones—were essentially tyrannical at their heart. This was despite efforts made by political leaders to a lesser or greater extent to veil the tyranny with various ideological cloaks.²⁴ Qutb claimed that the ubiquitous origin of all of tyranny is the exertion of control of one group of people over another, and in turn all forms of human authority are essentially tyrannical. Qutb identified these power relations running through all societies at every level, from within the family through to international relations. As all individuals and groups have their own desires that conflict, or are mutually exclusive with the interests of others, every exertion of power

²² Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

²³ There are striking similarities between this mythological pre-Islamic state of *jahiliyya* and Hobbes' pre-political state of nature. In the *Leviathan* the state of nature is escaped by the creation of a social contract that cedes all legitimate violence to a political sovereign, in Qutb's Islamist ideology *jahiliyya* is overcome through the recognition of the absolute sovereignty of God over all mankind. Only then will political, economic and social justice and stability prevail in the world.

²⁴ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* pp.373-374

will simultaneously involve a subjugation of at least one party. Following this principle Qutb grouped together the diverse ideologies of, amongst others, nationalism, communism, democracy, colonialism, theocracy, slavery, racism, fascism and capitalism as examples of the illegitimate exercise of power by man over man and thus tyrannical systems. As we discussed in the first chapter like many fervent ideologists Qutb condemned all other systems of thought as ideological whilst maintaining Islamism to be non-ideological. Only by stepping outside of the domain of humans and their partisan interests—by discarding ideology—can a society not based on force and free from suppression be achieved and this means returning all authority to God alone. Qutb expresses this argument eloquently:

Jahiliyya ... is deviation from the worship of One God and the way of life prescribed by God. ... [It] is evil and corrupt. ... Its roots are human desires ... which are used in the interests of some persons or some classes or some nations or some races, which interests prevail over the demand for justice, truth and goodness. But the pure law of God cuts through these roots and provides a system of laws which has no human interference, and is not influenced by human ignorance or human desire or for the interests of a particular group of people.²⁵

Qutb shared the same Gramscian view as al-Banna that the forces of Westernization and imperialism worked most effectively and insidiously when their values and norms were internalized by the host society at the political, communal and individual level. By acting from within the foreign values and ideologies are first mixed with the indigenous, authentic culture and political practice. They are then subsumed by local traditions before finally being autonomously replicated and reproduced by the host society. Eventually the foreign *weltanschauung* is entirely normalized and passively accepted as the only way of organizing society. Both al-Banna and Qutb saw this process as an unfolding tragedy that strangled the Arab and Muslim world—one that could only be reversed by an Islamic revival. Al-Banna called the process domestic or internal imperialism, whilst Qutb labelled it *jahiliyya*.

The different words are not mere semantics but demonstrate the diverging philosophies of the two thinkers. Whilst al-Banna was ambivalent to the issue of wholesale political reform and organization, merely stating the need for the government to rule in accordance with the principles of Islam, Qutb went much further. Instead of pursuing a 'compatibility' model he argued that the roots of *jahiliyya* were deeply entrenched in society at all levels, and that

²⁵ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* pp.129-132

jahiliyya and Islam were absolutely and irreconcilably opposed. Qutb was also much more explicit in attacking Islamic institutions and traditions than his predecessor. Although al-Banna was critical of al-Azhar, accusing it of passively accepting imperialism, he did not launch a wholesale attack on Islamic traditions. This was at least in part due to his sensitivity of the beliefs and practices of his followers and potential constituents, as well as his own deeply held Sufi beliefs. In contrast to al-Banna's conservatism Qutb had no such restrictions and therefore in his most radical writings was able to openly criticise the accumulated traditions of Islamic history, accusing them of being terminally infected with *franji* (foreign) ideas and therefore constituted *jahiliyya*: 'Our whole environment, peoples' beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws—is *jahiliyya*, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought are also constructs of *jahiliyya*.²⁶

Qutb used the category of *jahiliyya* to describe individual's cognitive state as well as social organization. A *jahili* psychological state is one that is infected by a commingling of man-made concepts with Islamic ones which Qutb refers to as 'pollution.' The first stage towards an Islamic revolution, as dictated in *Milestones*, is to expunge these foreign concepts from one's mind, to 'change ourselves so that we may later change the society.'²⁷ Again there is subtle shift from al-Banna's ideology to that of Qutb. Whilst al-Banna talked of resolving the dualisms of modernity and tradition into the single category of Islam, Qutb's rhetoric aims at obliterating all *jahili* ideas and practices. The pragmatic concerns of al-Banna as the head of a real organization meant that some form of political compromise in the Brotherhood's ideology was necessary to keep it on the right side of legality. Facing no such restraints whilst writing in prison Qutb advocated nothing less than a total transformation. 'Our foremost objective,' Qutb states in a typically vitriolic passage, 'is to change ... the *jahili* system at its very roots—this system which is fundamentally at variance with Islam and which, with the help of force and oppression is keeping us from living the sort of life which is demanded by our Creator.'²⁸

3.2.3 Dialectical account of Judaism, Christianity and Islam

²⁶ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.20

²⁷ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.21

²⁸ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.21

A significant part of Qutb's thinking is his dialectical and teleological account of Islam. By examining this frequently neglected part of Qutb's philosophy we will be better placed to understand why he thought a fundamental clash between Islam and the West was both inevitable and necessary; and also why Qutb steered the Islamist ideology towards a transcendent and utopian mode of thinking. This represented an important departure from al-Banna who held a static historical view of an Islam that had become ossified in the face of Western colonialism. The thesis that Qutb eventually draws from his dialectical account is one of Islam and *jahiliyya* embraced in an existential struggle. Although Qutb does not explicitly say so this provided an intellectual and moral justification for the terrorism the Islamist movement would later employ.

Qutb subscribed to a crude dialectical understanding of the origins and teleology of Islam. In his essay *Religion and society in Christianity and Islam* Qutb presents Judaism as a religion of Law and codes. Judaism however was corrupted by the Jewish claims to their privileged relationship with God as 'the chosen people,' and by turning the religion into 'a system of rigid and lifeless ritual, an empty and unspiritual sham.'²⁹ The Prophet Jesus arrived as a corrective to the staid, excessive legalism of Judaism to 'preach spiritual purity, mercy, kindness, tolerance ... and to moderate certain restrictions imposed on the Children of Israel.'³⁰ Judaism, which Qutb accused of only being concerned with the outer motions of religiosity, the 'external acts' of faith, was balanced by the Christian concern for the believer's inner-disposition, their moral sensitivity, aestheticism and spirituality. However as early Christianity developed in the political incubation of the Roman Empire it had no need, or ability, to extend its influence on wider society or the state and so it focussed exclusively on personal 'moral and spiritual purification.'³¹ Eventually this turned Christianity into an otherworldly religion concerned only with the personal relationship between the individual and his God; the salvation of souls in the afterlife, but not society in this world. The political governance of society was left to worldly profane powers—embodied in the State—whilst Christians absolved themselves of any ills that afflicted others. The rigid exclusivist legalism of Judaism, the thesis, had thus been excessively corrected by the antithesis: the inwardly-oriented otherworldliness and excessive spirituality of Christianity.

²⁹ Sayyid Qutb *Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam* p.151

³⁰ Sayyid Qutb *Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam* p.151

³¹ Sayyid Qutb *Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam* p.151

In the distinction that early Christians made between personal religious devotion and profane everyday life Qutb discerned the roots of modern secularism and communism. When Christianity spread to Europe with the Roman Empire and encountered barbarian societies the new adherents would retreat to the sanctified interior of the Church to confess their sins and seek spiritual purity and then return to the profane world to continue their life according to local law, customs or the sword. The bifurcation of an inner spiritual world and an outer mundane existence was symbolically replicated by the inner, peaceful sanctuary of Church where refuge could be sought from the outer, violent world of man. 'Hence,' Qutb claimed, 'arose that division between religion and the world in the life of Europe. ... Religion there has remained in isolation from the business and customs of life from the day of its entry to the present day.'³²

Contradicting the separation of domains of power, however, was the institution of the Church that like all manmade, *jahili* creations eventually sought to exert its influence, control and suppress others for its gain. Churchmen soon discovered that they could increase their earthly power and exploit their monopoly over the spiritual realm by acting as exclusive intermediaries between God and man. Due to the disparity in literacy between the class of priests and peasants, and their exclusive right to conduct ritual, they exerted absolute control over the word of God. In doing so they perverted it keeping the populace in awe of their power by threatening the eternal damnation of hell, or promising justice in the afterlife in compensation for the injustice of the world. Thus their power increased until they rivalled that of the worldly monarchs. Eventually both parties realised that the earthly and spiritual powers shared a material and political interest in keeping the masses subdued in order to maintain the *status quo* and so alliances were forged between the two powerful groups. Caught between 'temporal ... tyrants and religious despots' the violent secularism of Europe meant that people were controlled by the two powers, earthly and divine, threatening punishment in this life and the next, over the body and soul of men.³³ A reaction against this tension was inevitable and so the Marxist account of religion gained traction, and this, according to Qutb, explains communism's state atheism.³⁴

³² Sayyid Qutb *Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam* p.152

³³ Sayyid Qutb *Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam* p.153

³⁴ Sayyid Qutb *Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam* p.153

Resolving the dialectic of excessive codification and legalisation of Judaism and the spiritual, other-worldliness of Christianity, is the third and final iteration of God's revelation to man—the synthesis—Islam. Born into a power vacuum, Islam did not have to bow to the political might of empire, or withdraw from the world into aesthetic purity. It concerned itself both with inner spirituality and the practical life of the individual, society and governance. Combining elements of Mosaic Law with the Christian ideals of love, forgiveness and spirituality, Islam, at least in its first expression on earth, did not neglect any area of life, nor promote one aspect at the expense of others. Unlike Judaism it did not lay claim to a 'chosen people' but was given to all of mankind, and the nascent Muslim community fully understood their task to spread the message of the final, complete and comprehensive religion to all of humanity. Qutb powerfully proclaims:

So Islam chose to unite earth and heaven in a single system, present both in the heart of the individual and the actuality of society, recognizing no separation of practical exertion from religious impulse. Essentially Islam never infringes that unity

... The center of its being and the field of its action is human life in its entirety, spiritual and material, religious and worldly. Such a religion cannot continue to exist in isolation from society, nor can its adherents be true Muslims unless they practice their faith in their social, legal, and economic relationships. And a society cannot be Islamic if it expels the civil and religious laws of Islam from its codes and customs, so that nothing of Islam is left except rites and ceremonials.³⁵

The core purpose of Islam, according to this view, is to heal the 'hideous schizophrenia' of secular modern life that tears states, societies, families and individuals apart by spawning a multitude of irreconcilable and contradictory dualisms.

3.2.4 Islam

The foil to the Hobbesian chaos of *jahiliyya* is Islam. Islam is not merely the opposite of *jahiliyya*—Islamic truth to *jahili* falsehood, order to chaos, peace to war, happiness to misery, justice to injustice—but also represents the only possible and permanent solution to the state of *jahiliyya*.³⁶ Following in the footsteps of al-Banna, Qutb identified God's singularity

³⁵ Sayyid Qutb *Religion and Society in Christianity and Islam* p.154

³⁶ Richard C. Martin "The Religious Foundations of War, Peace, and Statecraft in Islam" p.92

(*tawhid*) and His absolute sovereignty (*al-hakimiya*) as the fundamental core of Islam.³⁷ Unlike his predecessor Qutb followed these principles to their logical and radical conclusion. Al-Banna accepted forms of human authority so long as they did not contradict Islam. By contrast Qutb took the principle of God's absolute authority to mean that no form of man-made control or authority was legitimate. Any exertion of power of man over man is a usurpation of God's sovereignty and elevates man to the position of God, thus adding partners to God and betraying the monotheistic principle.

Throughout *Milestones*, which may be aptly described as the Islamist manifesto, the idea of Islam is described as a 'revolutionary concept and a way of life, which seeks to change the prevalent social order and remould it according to its own vision.'³⁸ Qutb in his most radical and utopian mode is far less concerned with outlining the shape of the post-*jahili* world. He concentrates on a negative form of critique of the West, Communism and modernity in general, and announces a call to action. 'The word 'Muslim'' he claims, 'becomes the name of an international revolutionary party that Islam seeks to form in order to put its revolutionary programme into effect. *Jihad* signifies that revolutionary struggle involving the utmost use of resources that the Islamic party mobilizes in the service of its cause.'³⁹ When he comes to providing a positive account of what would come after the revolution he resorts to the abstract and utopian language of justice, peace, harmony, and unity.

3.2.5 Islam versus *Jahiliyya*

For Qutb exactly what the concrete realisation of Islam would look like is either unimportant or will be easily discovered once *jahili* institutions and ideas have been destroyed. In any case what is of crucial importance is that historically the forces of Islam and *jahiliyya* are implacably opposed and are in a state of permanent war. There are two distinct points that Qutb makes clear about the relationship between Islam and *jahiliyya*. The first is that they are entirely different and that Islam is truthful and good, whilst *jahiliyya* is falsehood and evil. Qutb writes 'it was practically demonstrated that it was impossible to achieve coexistence between two diametrically opposed ways of life with such deep-rooted and fundamental differences that affect every detail of concepts, beliefs, moral values, social behaviour, as

³⁷ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.372

³⁸ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

³⁹ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

well as social, economic and political structures.’⁴⁰ The essential difference that creates this opposition is that one system is based on submission ‘to other human beings and false deities’ and the other is ‘based entirely on submission of all mankind to God alone.’⁴¹ Qutb’s second point is that as a result of these critical differences there arises an implacable mutual hostility between the two systems that manifests itself ‘at every step and in every aspect of life.’⁴² Neither system can tolerate the existence of the other and, although the conflict takes on different forms according to different historical circumstances and temporary truces, the battle will not cease until one side eliminates the other.

Although obscured behind a multitude of other temporary and superficial conflicts and alliances the existential battle between Islam and *jahili* forces is the real and permanent driving force behind the history of mankind. Qutb illustrates this grand narrative by pointing to several historical periods of open hostility between Islam and *jahiliyya* where the masks of economic, political and racial interests have been removed to reveal the genuine root of conflict. In *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Quran* Qutb focuses on three periods where *jahili* forces have attempted to suppress or even destroy Islam, but he also makes it clear that a more detailed reading of history will reveal that many other world events have been driven by this fundamental clash.

The first period that Qutb discusses is the formation of the nascent Muslim community and the persecution that Mohammed and his followers faced first from Arabian tribes in Mecca and then the duplicity and treachery of the Jews in Medina. In both cases the *jahili* system sensed a threat to its political and economic power base from the weak power of Islam and attempted to extinguish it at source. The second period he identified was the Christian crusades against the holy land. For Qutb and many other Islamists the Crusades are a paradigm for Western and Christian religious oppression of the East and a framework for understanding modern international relations.⁴³ Qutb specifically dismisses revisionist accounts of the Crusades that identify internal political problems in Europe as their motivating cause. He insists that they remain a clear example of *jahiliyya* attempting to violently destroy Islam through the use of organized military forces. The final era is the one

⁴⁰ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

⁴¹ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

⁴² Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

⁴³ Bassam Tibi *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad* p.45

of European colonialism and imperialism in the East that Qutb recreates in his dualistic cast of *jahiliyya* suppressing Islam albeit hidden behind the masks of economic, political and cultural hegemony.

3.2.6 Jihad

One crucial element of Qutb's historical narrative is that although he concentrates on the periods where *jahiliyya* has attempted to suppress Islam he emphatically denies that the clash is a one-way conflict. Islam, claims Qutb, especially in its formative period expanded rapidly through both *da'wa* and *jihad*, making inroads against the domain of *jahiliyya*. As we have already seen Qutb argues that the domain of Islam is the entire planet and its constituents all of humanity and therefore it is incumbent on true Muslims to spread Islam until the forces of *jahiliyya* have been entirely defeated. Qutb insists that Islam is not merely a religion—a matter of individual personal belief or faith—as understood by the secular West but is a living principle and a 'way of life.'⁴⁴ Religion which is merely a matter of personal belief cannot be spread by force as violence cannot alter conscience. The secular critique of religious warfare does not, therefore, apply to Islam, because applying the secularist concept of religion to Islam is a category error. As Islam is not simply, or even principally, a matter of belief but is in fact a system whereby all sovereignty is returned to God, it is not a contradiction for the system to be forcibly spread. 'In an Islamic system,' Qutb states 'it is possible that different groups live under it even though they may choose not to adopt Islamic beliefs. They will, however, abide by its laws based on the central principle of submission to God alone.'⁴⁵

It is from this basis that Qutb argues against liberal or modernist Muslims who claim that *jihad* should be understood as defensive warfare. Qutb pejoratively labels Muslim scholars as 'defeatists' and 'apologists' who have meekly succumbed to Western 'orientalist' propaganda.⁴⁶ The 'orientalists' cynically castigate 'Islam as a violent movement which imposed its belief upon people by the sword,' and in a negative reaction Muslim scholars respond by claiming that Islam is a religion of peace and that *jihad* must be understood as

⁴⁴ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

⁴⁵ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur'an*

⁴⁶ Rudolph Peters *Jihad In Classical and Modern Islam* p.130

defensive warfare.⁴⁷ In this way the secularists succeed in imposing the secular concept of religion onto Muslims, not through the use of force, but by outmanoeuvring Muslims scholars into negatively internalizing and then disseminating *jahili* ideas to the wider Muslim community. The victory is complete as the Muslim researchers believe that they have correctly understood Islam for themselves and so their claims assume an aura of authenticity. 'These research scholars, with their defeated mentality, have adopted the Western concept of 'religion,' which is merely a name for 'belief' in the heart, having no relation to the practical affairs of life, and therefore they conceive of religious war as a war to impose belief on peoples' hearts.'⁴⁸

The fundamental error made by moderate Muslim authorities and scholars was to relativise Islam in the secular mould as simply one religion amongst many that should co-exist with other systems of belief under a religiously neutral state. Qutb, like al-Banna, entirely rejects this proposition but goes much further than his predecessor who had cautiously advocated a limited use of force or *jihad* to achieve the establishment of an Islamic state in Egypt and other Muslim countries. By contrast Qutb advocates worldwide *da'wa* and *jihad* regardless of national boundaries, which he considers illegitimate, until all sovereignty is returned to God and all *jahili* institutions have been eradicated. Employing a tenuous logic Qutb claims that people would not be forced to accept Islam but merely live in a system where they would be free to choose their faith. Qutb uses the concept of 'freedom' here to mean the radical equality of individuals under God's absolute sovereignty. Only once this has been achieved will people be truly free from the servitude of others to choose or reject Islam.⁴⁹

3.2.7 After the Islamic Revolution

Qutb claims it is in the interest of *jahiliyya* to obscure the battle between it and Islam. If the real conflict remains hidden then mankind will remain in a state of chaos, confusion and ignorance. Thus *jahili* intellectuals, politicians and the media (including Muslims) will attempt to demonstrate that Islam is not in fact in competition with the Western ideologies of secularism or liberal democracies, and that 'moderate' Islam—a phrase Qutb detests—is compatible with these institutions. Correctly understood Islam is a state when no power is

⁴⁷ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.76

⁴⁸ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.76

⁴⁹ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.56

exerted by man and God is made the sole sovereign of the earth. Islam, in stark contrast with the secular *jahili* tradition, is understood as being much more than a mere religion. Qutb insists that Islam must announce itself as pure system, unabashed and unashamed of its fundamental differences from *jahiliyya*. It should not ‘rationalize’ its principles to appease *jahili* society by presenting itself as ‘Islamic democracy’ or ‘Islamic socialism;’ nor should it pretend that only small changes need to be made to the prevailing ‘economic or political or legal systems.’⁵⁰

3.2.8 Muslim Nation

Rhetorically Qutb is more comfortable with the language of revolution than pragmatic politics. One of Qutb’s principal dilemmas when discussing the post-revolutionary world is his explicit commitment to rejecting all *jahili* concepts, especially the political ones. The self-imposed conceptual restrictions have a concomitant effect on the available language. This tension is betrayed in an examination of the concept of a ‘nation.’ Qutb contrasts the *jahili* concept of a nation with the potential Muslim concept. He defines the former as being a ‘homogenous group of people which assumes distinction from other groups on account of its shared belief in some foundational values.’⁵¹ From within an Islamic paradigm, the corresponding concept is defined as a community that makes the Islamic ‘faith the sole basis for the relationship between the individuals of [the] group.’⁵² Carefully avoiding endorsing the language of nationalism Qutb describes ‘this great Islamic society ... [where] peoples of all nations and all races ... were united, and with mutual cooperation, harmony and unity they took part in the construction of the Islamic community and Islamic culture. This marvellous civilization was not an ‘Arabic civilization’, even for a single day; it was purely an ‘Islamic civilization’. It was never a ‘nationality’ but always a ‘community of belief.’⁵³

Qutb’s re-imagination of the idea of a ‘nation’ serves a purpose beyond the rousing rhetoric. By removing the borders that traditionally define a nation—delineating one group of people from another—Qutb’s Muslim nation, or *umma*, potentially encompasses the entire world.⁵⁴ Qutb then claims that the traditional nation can utilize collective violence against another

⁵⁰ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.134

⁵¹ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur’an*

⁵² Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.48

⁵³ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* pp.49-50

⁵⁴ James Piscatori “Imagining Pan-Islam” pp.28-29

nation on two counts: in legitimate self-defence against foreign belligerence; and illegitimate aggression for some form of material gain in advancement of its particular interests. The Muslim *umma* when correctly conceived as a community of belief with no racial, linguistic or geographical boundaries must engage in legitimate collective defensive warfare when under attack.⁵⁵ However, in contrast with the *jahili* nation it possesses no partisan interests and its potential constituents are limitless, therefore it may legitimately engage in offensive warfare, not for material advantage, but to bring potential members into its folds.⁵⁶ The *umma* would not subjugate the conquered populace but merely free them from the political, material and conceptual restraints that had previously prevented them from making an entirely free choice to follow Islam.

Beyond the radical and utopian polemic imagining in detail what a world would look like where no forms of human power are exerted is an evidently difficult and paradoxical task and thus one that Qutb carefully avoided. The distinct lack of a thick description of what an Islamic state and society would look like or what form its political and economic system would take is addressed by Qutb in *Milestones* in two ways. Firstly, Qutb often refers back to the early period of the four rightly guided caliphs as an archetypal golden period where all aspects of private, social and political life were governed easily by the single standard of Islam. During this period it would only take ‘a few words from the lips of the Prophet’ for illegitimate practices such as drinking or gambling to be abolished.⁵⁷ As people would be living in harmony with Islam there would be no resistance to social reform. Qutb contrasts this to modern secular governments who ‘have to rely on legislation, administrative institutions, police and military power, propaganda and the press, and yet they can at most control what is done publicly, and society remains full of illegal and forbidden things.’⁵⁸

Secondly, when discussing the content of the *shar'ia* and the codes that would govern a true Islamic society he makes the argument that at no point in history have a people settled upon norms, laws and systems prior to forming a nation, but that these are formed and moulded symbiotically with the development of the society. Similarly, *Milestones* anticipates the internalizing of the true meaning of Islam by individuals, who would then, having rejected

⁵⁵ James Piscatori “Imagining Pan-Islam” pp.32-33

⁵⁶ James Piscatori “Imagining Pan-Islam” p.35

⁵⁷ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.32

⁵⁸ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.32

and destroyed *jahili* ideas and institutions, would create an Islamic society that would gradually create the institutions in sole accordance with the principles of Islam—an idea closely related to the ‘spontaneous order’ imagined by some anarchistic philosophies.

Qutb claims that this would be unproblematic due to the perfection of Islam, which when understood correctly, is entirely in accordance with human nature and so would easily resolve the multitude of contradictions and defects of *jahili* society. Qutb conceived of Islam as ‘a revolutionary concept and way of life,’ all aspects of social life and collective activities, such as science and the arts will flourish under Islam and questions of social justice would be resolved.⁵⁹ Clearly, Qutb rejects a narrow conception of *shar’ia* as mere legislation or religious law with the limited jurisdiction of personal and familial conduct; a view he attributes to Muslim apologists under the influence of a Western secularist ideology. Qutb writes ‘by ‘the shari’ah of God’ is meant everything legislated by God for ordering man’s life; it includes the principles of belief, principles of administration and justice, principles of morality and human relationships, and principles of knowledge.’⁶⁰ Finally all macro-level problems such as resource distribution, political competition and warfare would dissipate in an entirely Islamic world. Displaying his most utopian leanings and paraphrasing the Qur’an he asserts Islam’s ‘... ultimate aim being that there should be no strife on earth and all submission be made to God alone.’⁶¹

As vague as Qutb is about what the post-revolutionary world would look like he is even more evasive when describing how the revolution would be brought about. Although this vagueness fits in with the rest of Qutb’s abstract theory we can also assume that as the text of *Milestones* had to pass through the prison censors the author could not be too explicit about revolutionary tactics. The title ‘Milestones’ is sometimes translated as ‘Signposts’ and signifies that the text is to be used as manifesto and guide for Islamic revolutionaries. The Milestones are significant points for to help orientate the revolutionary vanguard on the road towards a revival of Islam and the deposal of *jahili* institutions and ideas. ‘It is necessary,’ writes Qutb in the introduction, ‘that this vanguard should know the landmarks and the milestones of the road toward this goal so that they may recognize the starting place, the

⁵⁹ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur’an*

⁶⁰ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.107

⁶¹ Sayyid Qutb *In The Shade of the Qur’an*

nature, the responsibilities and the ultimate purpose of this long journey.’⁶² The ‘vanguard’—which bears more than a passing resemblance to Leninism—is to be formed from a small group of people who have internalized the true meaning of Islam and its implacable opposition to *jahiliyya*, using Qutb’s theoretical writings as a guide.⁶³ This group, in imitation of the Prophet Mohammed and the nascent Muslim community, would form a true community of Believers that spiritually and physically withdraw and isolate themselves from the *jahili* society.⁶⁴

From this initial point Qutb enters into a more abstract mode of prescription, simply instructing that this group use ‘the methods of preaching and persuasion for reforming ideas and beliefs; and it uses physical power and *Jihad* for abolishing the organizations and authorities of the *Jahili* system,’ adding that ‘[t]hese two principles [of preaching and *jihad*] are equally important.’⁶⁵ Qutb does not fill in the details of the tactics to be used by the vanguard nor delineate the legitimate acts of physical power nor describes its potential targets. Instead he insists that Islam is not ‘merely a theoretical, philosophical and passive’ system of belief but a ‘positive, practical and dynamic’ movement, that must utilize every ‘appropriate means’ and ‘necessary methods’ to achieve its goal of ‘the universal ... freedom of man on the earth from every authority except that of God.’⁶⁶

Qutb clearly advocates both preaching and violence for the attainment of Islam’s goals, but importantly does not specify nor delimit the types of violence to be used. This is important as Qutb is often accused of providing the justification of terrorist violence for the advancement of his pan-Islamic ideals. Although he implicitly advocates violence, and does not specifically exclude the targeting of noncombatants, the targets that he does mention are the ‘material obstacles’ of ‘political powers.’⁶⁷ This includes all governments and the institutions upon which their powers ultimately rest such as the armed forces and the police. Qutb also issues a general call for the destruction of all other *jahili* institutions which presumably includes legal and economic systems. We may therefore conclude that although Qutb does

⁶² Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.12

⁶³ John Gray *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* pp.69-70

⁶⁴ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.21

⁶⁵ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.55

⁶⁶ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* p.59

⁶⁷ Sayyid Qutb *Milestones* pp.59-61

not specifically advocate violence directed against civilians, the scope of his offensive *jihad* would inevitably mean that noncombatants would be targeted.

3.2.9 The Evolution of the Islamist ideology from al-Banna to Qutb

There are three important distinct, but interlinked differences between Qutb and al-Banna's proposed methods for achieving their Islamic objectives. Firstly, al-Banna created the first Islamist, grassroots, mass-movement that existed within the existing political system with the aim of creating an Islamic state from below. The momentum for the movement and the source of its power were to be based on a wave of populism that would eventually overwhelm the inertia of the state. Qutb by contrast, advocated the creation of an exclusivist vanguard movement that would deliberately withdraw from the irredeemably corrupt *jahili* society and work from without to effect an Islamic revolution. The distinction of working within (and sometimes with) the state, society and its laws, to existing without and against these institutions and structures is perhaps the most significant shift between the thinking of Qutb and his predecessor.

The second difference is that al-Banna sought to avoid or at least postpone the use of openly violent action in the attainment of the Brotherhood's goals. This was not an entirely ideological decision as al-Banna created and supported the Secret Apparatus but he was clearly adverse to the chaos of revolution. However the main reason that al-Banna attempted to limit the potential violence of the Brotherhood was for the pragmatic rationale that the institutional structure of the organization would be destroyed by the more powerful Egyptian state if the Brothers committed themselves to an insurrection. Qutb did advocate an offensive *jihad*—including the use of force—alongside *da'wa* for the achievement of his utopian goals. However for several reasons Qutb's attitude towards violence and the important details of the tactics to employ and the targets to be aimed at—are deeply ambiguous. We can attribute this at least in part to the prison censors and to the shortening of his life and thus his literary output, but we can also detect a hesitancy in Qutb to commit the Islamist movement to open violence—perhaps due to fear of failure, or even the horror of bloodshed—that resulted in the author staying within the theoretical, abstract and utopian mode of language despite his claims that *Milestones*, and more generally Islam, is a practical guide for action.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Qutb writes at the beginning of *Milestones* that there would be further parts to be written.

The third ideological shift from al-Banna to Qutb is their respective scope of action for their movements. The Muslim Brothers despite their internationalist rhetoric and token armed intervention in Palestine were based physically and ideologically in Egypt. This was not just a practical geographical constraint but an acknowledgement by al-Banna of the existence of the nation-state of Egypt as a legitimate actor on the international stage, and a tacit acceptance of its internal legal and political structures. Al-Banna's brand of Islamism begrudgingly sits within a quasi-nationalist framework a fact reflected in his willingness to accept that one could simultaneously possess a Muslim and Egyptian identity and that loyalty to Islam was compatible with loyalty to the state. Although the Society of Muslim Brothers was exported to adjacent Arab countries they were autonomous organizations affiliated with the Egyptian Society but not subordinate to it. The idea of the global *umma* and the resurrection of the caliphate were certainly present in al-Banna's thinking but did not occupy a central position.⁶⁹ Qutb explicitly rejects this territorial position of multiple Islamist movements existing within the international system of nation-states.⁷⁰ We can attribute this in part to the new bipolar international order that promoted the importance of ideologically-orientated superpower blocs above nation-states. Within this framework Qutb advocated the formation of an Islamic bloc that would be able to compete on the world stage and offer an ideological alternative to the moribund liberal-democratic and Communist political philosophies. However this *realpolitik* manoeuvre was supplanted in Qutb's later radical and utopian thinking where he established the ideological principle that Islam is a system for all of humanity and the entire planet and thus should not be constrained within the manmade and illegitimate borders of the historical 'Muslim' nations.⁷¹

3.3 Abdessalam Faraj

The latent violence that had been suppressed by the Brothers and was given an ideological justification by Qutb had yet to be fully expressed by an Islamist group. It will be useful to briefly describe a movement that fulfils the archetypal characteristics of the rejectionist end of the ideological spectrum. Several movements sprang up in Egypt after Qutb's execution who attempted to live out his ideals. They would normally be formed around a charismatic

⁶⁹ Fred M. Donner "The Sources of Islamic Conceptions of War" p.37

⁷⁰ Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* p.232

⁷¹ Bassim Tibi "Jihadism and Intercivilisational Conflict: Conflicting Images of the Self and of the Other" p.43

leader who would gather a small following by preaching to students on the university campuses or in the slums around the big cities. One of these groups, simply called 'Jihad' was created in the late 1970s by a young electrical engineer Abdessalam Faraj. Quoting extensively from Ibn Taymiyya, Faraj wrote a pamphlet titled *Al Farida al Ghaiba* (The Hidden Imperative or The Missing Obligation) the title referring to the forgotten duty of *jihad*. Faraj was particularly concerned with the failure of the *ulema*, who were supposed to be representatives of the Muslim community, to recognise their obligation to depose of the ruler who fails to implement the tenets of Islam.⁷² The impotence of the *ulema*, reasoned Faraj, utilizing the arguments of Ibn Taymiyya, meant that the obligation fell on ordinary Muslims.

In contemporary Egypt President Anwar Sadat was equated with the Mongol invaders in the 13th century who adopted the outer garb of Islam but continued to rule according to their traditional Yassa code.⁷³ Faraj called Sadat an 'apostate of Islam fed at the tables of imperialism and Zionism.'⁷⁴ The specific and unforgivable transgression that vexed Faraj, and many other Egyptians, was Sadat's Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty signed in 1979. Shortly after the release of the pamphlet in 1981 Sadat was assassinated during a military parade by a Lieutenant Khalid Islambouli and three other soldiers. During his trial it was disclosed that Islambouli was a member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, an Islamist movement with close ties to Faraj's group.⁷⁵ It seems that Faraj had expected a spontaneous uprising to occur after the toppling of the leader, but apart from a small insurrection in Asyut in Upper Egypt which was swiftly put down by the army, this failed to materialize.

Their political naivety points to a something more fundamental than a mere lack of judgement by the Faraj's group. It shows that at the rejectionist end of the Islamist spectrum there was a deep unwillingness to engage with, and be sullied by, mundane *jahili* politics. This is further demonstrated by the critique that Faraj levelled at the Muslim Brotherhood in his pamphlet. He accused the Society of misunderstanding the fundamentally corrupt nature of the *jahili* state, and by attempting to gain power by engaging with the state they too had been irredeemably corrupted. Furthermore by working within the legal and political

⁷² Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.86

⁷³ Abdessalam Faraj *The Absent Obligation* p.23

⁷⁴ Abdessalam Faraj cited in Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.86

⁷⁵ Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* p.152

structures of the state they inadvertently endowed the state with Islamic legitimacy; rather than undermining the system they strengthened it.⁷⁶ The logic of withdrawal and rejection had led Jihad into a political cul-de-sac and demonstrated the gulf between the two polarities. Their refusal to engage in politics had spectacularly misfired. Not only did they fail to capitalise on the successful assassination of a head of state, but in the following months hundreds of Islamists were arrested and imprisoned—including Ayman al-Zawahiri, who would later become the head of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and a leader of al-Qaeda—and the cause of violent Islamist activity in Egypt disappeared for several years.⁷⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood, for fear of once again being dragged into illegality, had to publically condemn and distance itself from the assassination and so the gap was further widened between the jihadists and the moderate Islamists.

3.4 Conclusions

From al-Banna and the Muslim Brothers to Qutb and the radical Islamists of the 1960s we can trace the evolutionary changes in the Islamist ideology away from legal, non-violent, social and political action from within the existing Egyptian system to illegal, violent action from without. The characteristics of the movement also evolved during this period. The Muslim Brotherhood, a grassroots mass-movement working openly within the implicitly accepted framework of the nation-state were supplanted by a more ephemeral movement consisting of a dedicated vanguard existing separately from society and outside political and legal systems, concealing their potentially violent activities. In theory these groups could operate anywhere in the world although in reality their geographical dispersion was constrained from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s to Egypt and occasionally the surrounding Arab states. We have identified the driving force behind these ideological developments as the growth in power of the Brotherhood and the subsequent repression by the state. As the movement was declared illegal and its members were persecuted and driven underground into Egyptian prisons the ideology simultaneously mutated into a more subversive form withdrawn from its social base.

This new ideology found its voice in Qutb's prison writings and the fate of the author became a powerful metaphor and symbol for the subsequent Islamist movement. One of the most

⁷⁶ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* pp.86-87

⁷⁷ Walter Lacquer *No End To War: Terrorism In The Twenty First Century* p.37

famous images of Qutb frames the intellectual in a smart suit directing an interrogative gaze away from the camera from behind prison bars. With his execution by the Egyptian state in 1966 he was transformed from an intellectual into a martyr and would eventually be lauded as 'the godfather ideologue of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and al-Qaeda ... whose revolutionary writings have become a manifesto for Islamists and global jihadists everywhere.'⁷⁸ As well as elevating the status of Qutb into an iconic figure and increasing the demand and dissemination of his writings his hanging also prematurely ended his output. Had he been able to continue writing then it might have been necessary for him to clarify his position on the use of violence in the Islamist movement. Whatever the case Nasser's crude attempt to silence Qutb had the opposite effect and the cast of the globalised Islamist ideology was set.

Although we have identified the evolution of the Islamist ideology from al-Banna to Qutb it would be more accurate to describe a divergence between two polarised strands that had uneasily coexisted within the Muslim Brotherhood. The contradictions between the legal and peaceful method of capturing political power that al-Banna favoured, and the violent impulse that was embodied in the Secret Apparatus, were never resolved and eventually led to the Brotherhood's downfall. The difference between these two strands amounted to more than just a disagreement over acceptable and efficient means; they also represent diverging views over what the goals of the Islamist movement ought to consist. Partisans of the first strand commonly labelled 'reform,' 'liberal,' or, usually, 'moderate' Islam, operate within the political system by adapting the core of the Islamist ideology to present it as broadly compatible with the existing legal and political structures. Their basic, reconciliatory premise is that Islam can potentially exist in harmony with secular political and legal institutions. They also emphasize the social justice, heritage and ethical values of Islam that they claim ought to take a central place in the life of the state, society and the individual. In practice this translates as a demand for a constitution that officially recognises Islam as the religion of the state and its people, and the implementation of some form of *shar'ia* so that at a minimum the secular legal code does not obviously contradict religious law. Due to their reconciliatory rhetoric towards the existing political order this strand of Islamism often found itself co-opted by the state in order to isolate or draw support away from the other polarity: the Islamists.

⁷⁸ Adnan Musallam *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* pp.171-172

The second strand, which is commonly labelled 'Islamist' or 'radical Islam', exists at the other end of the spectrum. Here no concessions are made to the core ideological principle established by Mawdudi, al-Banna and Qutb, namely that God's sovereignty is complete, absolute and supreme and so cannot be legitimately contravened by man. Any system that does not recognise God's absolute sovereignty is labelled *jahiliyya* and there can be no compromise between this and Islam; there can be no hybrid system. It is this position that allows us to describe this strand of the Islamist ideology as 'radical.' The result of this ideological intransigence is that at the Islamist end of the spectrum there can be no rapprochement between the movement and the state. The group must exist outside of the political system, usually on the wrong side of legality and often employing violent tactics. If they do enter into the political process it will be on the platform of transforming or destroying the existing system once power has been achieved. As with the first strand of Islamism, and in common with other radical and utopian political philosophies, the Islamists are necessarily vague about what sort of system would be implemented after the revolution. This is partly due to the Islamist ideology defining itself in opposition to the existing order; thus once the old order is eliminated, the Islamists are faced with an existential identity crises. As we have seen with Qutb the ideology does not necessarily lead to any concrete positive political and social vision beyond the most abstract notions of a just society ordered according to Islamic principles under the absolute sovereignty of God. The further that groups pursue the logic of this end of the spectrum, the further they are cast adrift from the political and social reality of the world, eventually leading to the symbolic and transcendental violence of groups such as al-Qaeda.⁷⁹

By reflecting on the specific changes in the Islamist ideology of this period we can make some observations about ideology in general. The Islamist ideology managed to adapt rapidly to the changing political, material and social circumstances. In common with other comprehensive ideologies the Islamist ideology possesses a core nucleus of fundamental ideas around which a number of other, tertiary but connected ideas rotate. The property of a permanent core gives the ideology a permanence and allows a disparate set of actual movements to be fundamentally linked by a shared truth. Conversely, the flexibility of the tertiary related ideas that are relatively replaceable or whose relative importance fluxes across time and circumstance allows the ideology and its movements to adapt and evolve to new

⁷⁹ Mark Juergensmeyer *Terror In The Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* p.125

political, social and material realities. The properties of a solid core and a fluid periphery accounts for the resilience of an ideology to simultaneously avoid becoming an anachronism in a changing world and also avoid alteration into something entirely unrecognisable to the original vision. This brings us back to one of our points in the first chapter: successful ideologies are not dogmatic, static and monolithic but heterogeneous, fluid and organic.

4 The Globalization of the Islamist Ideology

4.1 Introduction

Why did 9/11 happen? This cannot be definitively answered but we can address the question of what 9/11 meant. Specifically what was its meaning from the perspective of its perpetrators and organizers and the wider Islamist movement? As we discussed in the first chapter a frequently neglected approach to answering this question is to engage in interpretive-understanding of the ideology that informed the Islamists' worldview and actions. We have undertaken this task by critically examining the historical evolution of the ideology alongside the historical development of the Islamist movement and studied the interactions between these two streams. In this final chapter we shall closely examine the period from the death of Qutb in 1966 to the attacks in 2001. We shall see how the radical-utopianism of Qutb was transformed into the globalized Islamist movement embodied in al-Qaeda. The process of transformation was not unproblematic and the tensions and contradictions that had been present from the beginning of the modern Islamist ideology continued to manifest themselves in the philosophy of late modern Islamists.

In the 1970s and 80s the diverging paths, observed in the previous chapter, of the moderates and the radicals were played out on the world stage. A second split on a separate axis also occurred during this period. After the assassination of Anwar Sadat a new fault line began to form between the radical Islamists who pursued their agenda at home, in an attempt to overthrow the state and seize domestic power, and those who pursued Qutb's logic of the globalized *umma* and began to act and, crucially, see themselves as actors, on the global stage.¹ The first group was largely stymied during the 1970s and 1980s as the regimes in Egypt and other Arab countries such as Syria and Libya became more authoritarian with the real centre of power residing with the military.² Under these conditions the Islamist militants were subdued although were never completely eradicated. Successful terrorist attacks on Western tourists in Egypt in the 1980s and 1990s succeeded only in alienating these Islamists from large segments of the general population, many of whom depended on the tourist trade for their livelihood. They also prompted successive waves of government repressions

¹ Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* p.15

² Derek Hopwood *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society* p.54

resulting in thousands of Islamists being incarcerated in Egyptian jails where many faced torture.³

The growing frustration and lack of direction at home meant that many Egyptian and Arab Islamists were drawn towards the second group that sought to pursue a Qutbian agenda abroad. Initially this movement focused on Palestine after the humiliating defeats in 1948 and 1967 of Arab armies at the hands of Israel. However, the mantle of Palestinian resistance was grasped by secular nationalists, pan-Arabists and international left-wing organizations that did not allow room for the Islamists to engage in a Palestinian *jihād*. Finally, in 1979 an opening was created by the confluence of several global events that combined to create a conflict that could be easily understood within the narrative framework of the international Islamists. Their pent-up frustration was effectively channelled into this opening by regimes happy to see the back of militants that had troubled them for decades.⁴ The trajectory of the Islamists' described and defined by al-Banna and Qutb can, in part, explain this latest evolution, but three world events provided the geopolitical conditions and the catalyst for the globalization of the Islamist ideology.⁵

4.1.1 The Three Global Events of 1979: Iranian Revolution

In terms of global politics and international media coverage the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and the subsequent hostage crises created by the occupation of the U.S. embassy, was the most significant event to take place that year. However its direct and lasting effect on the Islamist movement under study are less clear.⁶ The Western-backed and modernizing monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was swept away by an alliance of the devout middle classes, the *ulema*, the bazaar merchants, the student movement, and the rural and urban poor. The secular constitution was replaced by a theocratic constitution, and with the creation of the position of the Supreme leader and the Council of Guardians the Islamic Republic of Iran was born—a country that superficially resembled al-Banna's vision of an Islamic state.

³ Giles Kepel "Islamists versus the State in Egypt and Algeria"

⁴ For different reasons the logic of the Cold War era also meant that the Americans were eager supporters of the anti-Soviet *jihād*.

⁵ A fourth event not discussed here was the 1979 peace treaty signed by Israel and Egypt.

⁶ The revolution and the Islamic Republic, its proximate causes and its immediate and long-term effects have been the subject of large swathes of scholarship but space restricts us from attempting an in-depth analysis in this work, however we shall permit ourselves a few brief remarks on its influence on the Sunni Islamist movement.

From the start of the modern Islamist movement al-Banna had placed the idea of unity at the centre of the Islamist ideology and in theory this included international, intra-communal and cross-denominational unity. In practice however, even the radical utopianism of Qutb, with his entirely reconceived idea of the Islam and the *umma*, had failed to bridge the gap between the Sunni and Shi'ite denominations. State-sponsored attempts to export the Islamic revolution were for the most part restricted to the Persian Gulf states with large Shi'ite minorities and repressive monarchs. Thus despite the iconic symbolism of the first successful Islamic Revolution and the Islamists' rhetoric of unity, the ideological influence on the Sunni Islamist movement was limited. As Walter Lacquer laconically remarks, 'it was, alas, the wrong sort of Islam; the differences between Sunnis and Shi'ites were too deeply rooted in history to make close cooperation possible.'⁷ Although the ideological fallout may have been restricted the galvanising and stimulating effect on the Islamists must have been important especially since at this point the movement's morale and momentum had reached a low ebb.

4.1.2 Occupation of Grand Mosque

The second 1979 event occurred on the 20th November (or more significantly, on the first day of the Islamic calendar's fifteenth century) when several hundred militants belonging to a Wahhabi sect, and their followers including women and children, occupied the Great Mosque of Mecca during early morning prayers.⁸ The messianic sect was led by Juhaiman ibn Said al-Utaiba who claimed his brother-in-law as the Mahdi—a prophesised redeemer of Islam who would rid the world of injustice before the Day of Judgement. Of more importance than the beliefs of the sect was the challenge that the occupation raised to the legitimacy of the Saudi regime. The Saud family's Islamic credentials had rested on their custodianship of the two holy places of Mecca and Medina and their ability to administer the *hajj* (pilgrimage). They had attempted, through their political control of the Muslim World League, and aggressive funding with petro-dollars of ultra-conservative Wahhabism throughout the Muslim world, to embody the very idea, and dominate the discourse, of orthodox Islam.⁹ The Saudi royal family had anticipated challenges to their authority to come from either secular Arab

⁷ Walter Lacquer *No End To War: Terrorism In The Twenty First Century* p.50

⁸ Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* p.56

⁹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* pp.61-62

nationalism or Soviet-sponsored Marxism—or the latest threat of the Iranian revolution—but certainly not from native Sunni Islamists.

Although the occupation was put down by several thousand Saudi security personnel the fact that it took two weeks, and that Pakistani and non-Muslim, French anti-terrorist operatives were required, undermined the central pillar of Saudi Islamic credentials: their ability to keep the holy cities secure. Although the proximate effect of the insurrection was restricted—the violent hostage taking at the holiest site of Islam failed to garner wider support—the long term effects were more profound. The undermining of their religious credentials by inviting non-Muslims to enter Mecca exposed the Saudi's dependence on the West and their inability to protect the holy sites and by extension the global *umma* in general. This dependency would be replicated with an even more profound impact in the prelude to the first Gulf War and the positioning of around half a million U.S. troops on Saudi soil. It also exposed, in the Islamists' mind, the fact that Saudi power rested on the sale of oil to the West and the reciprocal protection afforded by the West, a fact that the House of Saud tried to disguise with the aura of religious orthodoxy hypocritically paid for with petro-dollars.

4.1.3 Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan

The immediate outcome of the occupation of Mecca, in common with the Iranian revolution, was to provide a galvanising effect on the Islamist movement and to undermine Saudi legitimacy and by extension the Islamic credentials of all the other conservative regimes in the Middle East. The final event of 1979, however, provided a slower burning and more profound defining influence on the Islamist ideology, its organizational shape and *modus operandi* for the next two decades and into the 21st century. Of the three major events of 1979, this would be the one that provided the conditions and the impetus for the Islamist movement to transcend its localised roots and transform itself from a restricted parochial endeavour to a globalized, potentially limitless one.

The timing of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan to prop up an ailing communist government was not without significance. A month after Islamist students stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran on 4th November 1979, marking the start of a 444 day hostage crisis; the Soviets deployed the 40th Army Division into Kabul. They finally withdrew nine years later

in 1989 just two years before the final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The resistance to the client communist government and Soviet occupation was cast within an Islamic framework and primarily conducted by Afghan *mujahedeen* (freedom fighters). Their ranks were composed of mostly rural Afghans who followed a traditional Sufi Islam and who had been alienated by the communist's regime of 'radical agrarian reform, compulsory literacy, and the imposition of socialism, through thousands of arrests and summary executions.'¹⁰

From the beginning of the insurgency that had started in the previous year to the Soviet involvement a trickle of foreign Islamists arrived in Pakistan to aid the *mujahedeen*. Their *jihād* however was formed along very different lines to that of the Afghans. The grand narrative that inspired their involvement was one of an Islam under attack by the atheist communists, which in itself was a subplot of a much more fundamental story of Islam's clash with the *jahili* world of unbelief. This was an extension of Qutb's doctrine of the unending and existential battle of Islam versus *jahiliyya*; finally the world depicted in *Milestones* had come to pass in reality. Qutb's binary narrative, was in the end however, too idealistic to capture this new world and so would need to be reformulated by the new generation of ideologists: Abdullah Azzam, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden.

The Islamists were not the only ones to view the USSR's occupation within a grander narrative. The conflict was naturally interpreted within the Cold War paradigm and the response by the U.S. and their allies was determined by its logic. American support for the resistance invoked the Cold War zero-sum logic that stated that what was bad for the Soviets must therefore be beneficial for the U.S. The American strategists led by Zbigniew Brzezinski reasoned that trapping the Soviets in Afghanistan with a long war of attrition would sap their political and military strength. Brzezinski later claimed that the U.S. had acted proactively through the use of covert operations in Afghanistan earlier in the year, to tempt the Russians to intervene; Afghanistan was to be for the Soviets, what Vietnam had been for the U.S.¹¹ It was in America's interest, therefore to support an insurgency style of asymmetric warfare that, although not expected to defeat the Soviets, would at least be very resilient against eradication and thus would draw out the length and cost of the conflict. The two very different motives of the U.S. and the Islamists segued together to produce strange

¹⁰ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.138

¹¹ Noam Chomsky 9-11 p.82

bedfellows and paradoxical alliances and, eventually, some unforeseen and unintended consequences.

A marriage of convenience would not have been possible however without an intermediary that could facilitate the cooperation of two ideological adversaries and this role was fulfilled by General Zia ul-Haq's Pakistan and their intelligence agency, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).¹² By channelling weaponry and finance through the ISI the American and Saudi source of the aid was sufficiently disguised to be accepted by the *mujahedeen*. However it also ensured that there was a massive leakage of weaponry from every shipment onto the black market and into the unaccountable hands of the international *jihadists* and various other criminal elements and tribal warlords in the region. Once the remainder had reached the intended Afghan recipients, the trucks were loaded with heroin and from Pakistan were distributed into the lucrative international drug trade. This mixture of an unfettered drug trade, influx of committed Islamists and flood of weapons and cash, combined with the harsh topography of the mountainous border area, resulted in creating one of the world's most violent and lawless regions to the present day.¹³

The reaction of the Muslim states was more complex than that of the U.S. In general the bipolar world order meant that states that were beneficiaries of Soviet largesse, such as Syria and Algeria, would not protest against the occupation and meant that the Islamic states were unable to act as a coherent political bloc.¹⁴ Support, therefore, for the Afghan refugees and *mujahedeen* came primarily in the form of financial donations (charity or *zakat*) from conservative U.S. allies in the Middle East, principally Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and from Muslim individuals around the world. For some, however a monetary contribution did not suffice; they wished to participate in the physical *jihad* against the atheist aggressors. The trickle of foreign, primarily Arab, Islamists into Afghanistan via Pakistan increased in the mid-1980s as it became clear that the Afghan resistance was long-lasting and resilient enough to provoke the Soviets into employing a scorched earth strategy and other repressive measures that had a deleterious impact on the civilian population. The narrative discourse of 'Islam under attack' gained currency amongst many Muslims worldwide and thus provided a popular, theological, and geopolitical justification for a defensive *jihad*. This ultimately

¹² Shaun Gregory "The ISI and the War on Terrorism"

¹³ Overseas Security Advisory Council "Pakistan Crime and Safety Report 2010: Peshawar"

¹⁴ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* pp.209-211

resulted in the physical and ideological relocation of the Islamists from Egypt and the Middle East to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

4.2 Analysis of the Afghan Jihad on the Islamist Movement

To understand the modern history of the Islamist movement it is essential to examine in some detail the Afghan *jihad*. This campaign profoundly affected all aspects of the Islamist movement: its ideological structure, its organizational and operational form and the self-identify or worldview of its adherents. These are not, however, autonomous categories, but are intrinsically linked and interdependent on one another. For example, the organizational forms, its structures and hierarchies that the Islamist groups took on had a determining effect on the ideological shifts within the movement. The reverse was equally true; the new ideological forms that, for instance, emphasized a defensive, asymmetric *jihad*, and had a formative influence on the shape of the new organizations. In this study we are principally interested in the ideological evolution, but when useful we shall also refer to the changing modes of organisation and self-identification. One method of charting these changes is to examine to examine them as they occurred under the influence of the principal protagonists of the Afghan *jihad*: Abdullah Azzam and Ayman al-Zawahiri.¹⁵

4.2.1 Abdullah Azzam (1941-1989)

The logistics of harnessing non-state support was left to non-governmental organisations that were able to provide the bureaucratic networks necessary to recruit and channel money and enthusiastic volunteers keen for the opportunity to participate in what was presented as an unambiguously legitimate and urgent *jihad*.¹⁶ For these volunteers their port of entry into the conflict was Peshawar, near the border with Afghanistan and henceforth the hub of Islamist activities in the region. This was also the area where approximately three million Afghan refugees had settled into displacement camps after having fled the conflict.¹⁷ Just as the Muslim states were reluctant to become directly involved with the logistics of exporting volunteers to Pakistan so too were they unable and unwilling to directly organize them once they arrived. The massive Saudi financial commitment, however, meant that they needed

¹⁵ For the sake of style we shall discuss the third main protagonist Osama bin Laden later in the chapter.

¹⁶ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.139

¹⁷ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.137

reliable agents on the ground to control its distribution to the Afghan *mujahedeen*. To this end they dispatched Arab volunteers, under the aegis of the Saudi Red Crescent and other humanitarian organizations, to the region to administer the distribution of aid in the chaotic environment of the camps. As the conflict continued some of these foreign volunteers left the refugee camps in order to organize the growing number of Arabs who arrived in Pakistan to participate in the *jihad*.

Amongst these volunteers was the university professor Abdullah Azzam. Azzam was born in Palestine in 1941 and received the same mixture of religious and secular education as al-Banna and Qutb. He went on to study *shar'ia* at the University of Damascus where he joined the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁸ A year after graduating, and now an influential figure in the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, the 1967 Six-Day war ended with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Azzam was one of the few Palestinian Brothers at the time that favoured armed resistance against Israel and thus was one of a small number of Islamists who participated in the war. In the aftermath he joined the Palestinian exodus to Jordan and became involved with the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) paramilitary activities but soon became frustrated with their secular Marxist ideology.¹⁹ Consequently, he enlisted in al-Azhar where he gained a doctorate in 1973 in Islamic Jurisprudence. During this period Azzam would almost certainly have become aware of Qutb's radical Islamist philosophy as his books and pamphlets were beginning to be printed and widely distributed.

At the outbreak of conflict with King Hussein's forces in September 1970 Azzam was teaching in the University of Jordan but was expelled from the country along with the rest of the PLO. Azzam, who was already at an ideological distance from the PLO, accused its leadership of fighting the wrong enemy, and broke off contact with the group. He also gradually became disillusioned with the Palestinian Muslim Brothers—the predecessors of Hamas—who were pursuing a quietist agenda of social work, charity and preaching in the Occupied Territories that he believed had wilfully acquiesced to the fundamental problem of the existence of the Jewish State. Allowed back into Jordan as a professor of *shar'ia* in 1973, he was once again required to leave a few years later when his Qutbian-inspired radical Islamist philosophy clashed with the conservative agenda of the Jordanian royal family. Continuing in his nomadic academic career he moved to teach at Abd al-Aziz University in

¹⁸ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.139

¹⁹ Jeni Mitchell "The Contradictory Effects of Ideology on Jihadist War-Fighting: The Bosnia Precedent"

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.²⁰ At the same time Osama bin Laden was attending the same university but was studying a non-religious course. It is unlikely, therefore, that Azzam taught him directly but there does appear to have been some contact between them as it was Azzam who later persuaded bin Laden to join him in Afghanistan.²¹

4.2.2 The Ideology of Abdullah Azzam

The circumstances surrounding Azzam's own decision to move to Peshawar are also unclear. Following the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan he released a pamphlet entitled *The Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman* in which, clearly inspired by Qutb, he argued the idea of a pan-Islamic *jihadi* movement that transcended the parochialism of the Muslim Brotherhood movements constrained by the Middle Eastern borders drawn by Western colonisers.²² In this *fatwa* and a later essay, *Join The Caravan*, Azzam sets out the theological and geopolitical case for a compulsory *jihad* in Afghanistan. Quoting from Ibn Taymiyya, the Qur'an and several *hadith*, he argues that an attack on *dar al-Islam* (Muslim land) necessitated a response by the *umma*. However, unlike some conservative Muslim jurists he claimed that as this was a defensive *jihad* the responsibility to participate in the physical fight fell upon all able-bodied Muslims as a *fard ayn* (individual duty) as opposed to a collective or *fard kifayah* (sufficient duty) that may be delegated by the community to a group such as the army. This narrative of a defensive *jihad* also meant that merely donating money was insufficient as a substitute for physical participation.

In these pamphlets Azzam also addressed the question of why the *jihad* in Afghanistan should take precedence over the Palestinian struggle against the Zionists, despite his personal attachment to his native country. He linked the two conflicts together, along with all other acts of aggression against Muslims and Islamic land, by claiming that they are all part of the same global struggle between forces of *jahiliyya* and Islam. The fusing together of different conflicts is an important step for Azzam and the Islamist ideology. It allowed the Islamists to imagine themselves as global actors where an attack on any Muslim in the world constituted an attack on the entire *umma*. Azzam was adamant that the Palestinian cause remained at the

²⁰ Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* p.73

²¹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.145

²² 'Iman' approximately translates as 'faith.'

heart of this globalised discourse and as a unifying, motivating symbol of the *jihadist* movement:

Our presence in Afghanistan today, which is the accomplishment of jihad and of our devotion to the struggle, does not mean we have forgotten Palestine. Palestine is our beating heart, it comes even before Afghanistan in our minds, our hearts, our feelings and our faith²³

Unlike Qutb, Azzam was not dealing with idealised abstractions; at the peak of his power in Afghanistan it is estimated that he had between 8,000 and 25,000 committed armed activists under his influence in the training camps.²⁴ It was therefore necessary for him to consider the limited capabilities and resources of the *jihadist* movement and to prioritise one arena of *jihad* over others. The reasons that Azzam provides for prioritising Afghanistan over Palestine are all pragmatic, geopolitical considerations. For example, he says that in Afghanistan the conditions are more conducive for asymmetric warfare as there are '3000kms of open border ... and regions of tribes not under political control ... however, in Palestine ... the borders are closed.'²⁵ He also provides the political consideration that in Palestine the resistance was first seized by 'communists, nationalists and modernist Muslims' who are fighting the battle under 'the banner of a secular state' whilst in Afghanistan the 'Islamists ... [were] the first to take control.'²⁶

The translation of Qutbian theory into practice meant a reorientation away from the utopianism of Qutb towards the pragmatism of Azzam. This was a shift that was discernable, in the opposite direction, from al-Banna to Qutb. However, as practice also shapes and constrains theory, there is also a discernable realignment of the ideology from Qutb to Azzam. Although there is a brief mention at the beginning of *The Defense of Muslim Lands* of the *fard kifayah* for the *umma* to depose of corrupt Muslim leaders he immediately dismissed this obligation by quoting ibn Taymiyya: 'the defensive jihad, which is repelling an aggressor, is the most tasking type of jihad.'²⁷ Azzam adds that 'expelling the Kuffar [unbelievers] from our land ... is the most important of all the compulsory duties.'²⁸ By emphasizing the crucial importance of a defensive *jihad* Azzam downplays the utopianism of

²³ Abdullah Azzam cited in Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.147

²⁴ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.147

²⁵ Abdullah Azzam *The Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*

²⁶ Abdullah Azzam *The Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*

²⁷ Abdullah Azzam *The Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*

²⁸ Abdullah Azzam *The Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*

Qutb and his radical goal of destroying all *jahili* institutions and ideas. Furthermore, Azzam solidifies the abstract narrative of 'Islam under attack' into the more precise, but still radical, notion of Muslim lands, or former Muslim land, under the occupation or control of the *kafir*.

4.2.3 Afghan-Arabs

It was around Azzam and others like him, that the influx of foreign *jihadists* gathered. They initially required a place to stay in Peshawar where several guesthouses had been created to accommodate and register the Islamists, before being transferred to training camps along the border. Here the recruits received several weeks of ideological indoctrination and basic physical and arms training. For many of the sons of wealthy Saudi families their actual participation in the *jihad* would be a trip across the border in an all-terrain vehicle to have a photograph taken posing with an AK47.²⁹ Other, more serious *jihadists*, however, did form small units and fought alongside the Afghan insurgents earning them the *nom de guerre* of 'Afghan Arabs.' This latter group were mainly comprised of militants who had previously been arrested in their own country for activities connected with Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and whose passage to Peshawar was sanctioned by governments only too willing to get rid of a problem.

The mythology that Azzam created around the Afghan Arabs was more important than the reality of their contribution to the war. There were probably fewer than three thousand fighters and the majority of these either failed to leave Peshawar or did not take part in actual combat.³⁰ However, Azzam through a relentless propaganda campaign, rendered the *jihad* in Afghanistan as a 'primeval, metaphysical [battle] fought in a landscape of miracles.'³¹ Tales of martyred Islamists whose bodies lay intact and did not decay circulated freely and even nature was depicted as intervening with flocks of birds rising in anticipation of Soviet air strikes. The narrative that Azzam brilliantly constructed cast the Muslim Afghans as a pristine, unsullied and righteous people, fighting with the aid of God and the selfless Muslim *umma*, against the atheist 'brutal, soulless, mechanized force of modernity,' played by the

²⁹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.148

³⁰ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.105

³¹ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.96

Soviet aggressors.³² This was the emblematic, pure and unproblematic *jihad* of Islam against *jahiliyya* that Qutb had dreamt of in his Cairo cell two decades previously.

4.2.4 Ayman al-Zawahiri (1951-present)

The second main protagonist in Peshawar during this period was the Egyptian physician Ayman al-Zawahiri. It is worth looking briefly at Zawahiri who would not only become an important ideologist and leader of an Islamist movement in Egypt and al-Qaeda, but whose Islamist career mirrored the general developments of this period. Zawahiri, like most radicals after the 1960s was deeply influenced by Qutb but became increasingly frustrated with the failure of the Islamists to make any progress in Egypt. Zawahiri had joined the Muslim Brotherhood at a young age but when Qutb was executed Zawahiri, along with several classmates, pledged to 'put Qutb's vision into action.'³³ To this end he formed an underground cell that was later subsumed under the umbrella of Faraj's group, Jihad, before forming into Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ)—sometimes referred to as the Jihad group or al-Jihad.

After the assassination of Sadat, Zawahiri was arrested along with hundreds of others, and the leaders of the plot were hanged. The sentencing, however, for the three thousand other militants was more lenient, with Zawahiri serving just three years in prison. In prison Zawahiri and the other Islamists suffered intense physical and psychological torture including long stretches of isolation in Cairo's notoriously brutal prisons. The corporal and mental wounds suffered during this period is often cited by the members of the Islamist movement in the 1980s and 90s as one of the key motivating factors in pursuing the *jihad* to Afghanistan and as an explanation for the escalating brutality of the Egyptian campaign. Montasser al-Zayyat, a member of the Jihad group and later a lawyer for *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group), recalls that Zawahiri left Egypt to travel to Jeddah in 1985 because of the 'painful memory' of being forced to give up the location of an Islamist associate to the Egyptian Armed Forces 'under the pain of torture.'³⁴

³² Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.96

³³ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.37

³⁴ Montasser al-Zayyat *The Road To al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right Hand Man* p.31

4.2.5 The Near and Far Jihad: Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad

Following the repressions Jihad split into two groups. EIJ was primarily based in Cairo and *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* that operated in southern Egypt. The latter engaged in a sporadic and disjointed campaign of terrorism mainly against Copts in the south and Western tourists, whilst the core of militants of EIJ fled to Pakistan following their release from prison. *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* by pursuing the violent utopian ideology of Qutb at home eventually isolated itself from its potential popular base—the natural supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in the past—and became excluded from any role in the political process. Zawahiri observed this regression into directionless, arbitrary violence and realized that the goals of the Islamists were only going to be frustrated by pursuing an unpopular asymmetric war against a strong repressive state.

Zawahiri and other EIJ members had travelled to Pakistan, via Saudi Arabia where he first met Osama bin Laden, in order to join the resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.³⁵ He swiftly superseded the nominal leader of EIJ, Abdul al-Zumur, who had been imprisoned for life, and began to exert his own ideas on the group. It was around this time in Peshawar in the mid-1980s that Zawahiri befriended and became the physician of bin Laden.³⁶ For the first few years Zawahiri's role in Afghanistan is not well documented and it is unclear if he played an important role in the conflict, this changed however as the Afghan *jihad* drew to a close. The proximity of Zawahiri to bin Laden allowed him to impart his ideas for the future direction of the displaced international Islamists who were unsure of their place, purpose and direction after Afghanistan.

The Soviets withdrew in 1989 and Afghanistan descended into a civil war with competing factions of the *mujahedeen* and other groups fighting for power but unable to finally dislodge the communist government from power in Kabul. For the international *jihadists* the internecine conflict of various tribes and warlords did not hold much ideological interest and the funding from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia dropped away with the Red Army exodus.

4.2.6 The Ideology of Ayman al-Zawahiri

³⁵ Montasser al-Zayyat *The Road To al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right Hand Man* p.31

³⁶ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

According to the Islamists' narrative the U.S. and other Western powers were mere 'paper tigers' that could be felled with a well-placed blow. Zawahiri later boasted that 'the jihad battles in Afghanistan destroyed the myth of a [superpower] in the minds of the Muslim Mujahedeen young men. The USSR, a superpower with the largest land army in the world, was destroyed and the remnants of its troops fled Afghanistan before the eyes of the Muslim youths and as a result of their actions.'³⁷ As well as testifying to the physical strength of the Islamists it also provided tangible proof of the superiority of the Islamist ideology over the atheist, *jahili* ideology of communism and by extension other Western, manmade ideologies. These dual strands of the Afghan-Arab's mythology gave credence to Qutb's grand narrative of the eternal and inevitable battle of Islam and *jahiliyya* and lent the international Islamists' ideology a transcendental aura.³⁸

The effect that Zawahiri had on the Islamist ideology can be understood by examining what can be thought of as his retrospective manifesto written around the time of the U.S.-led coalition's invasion of Afghanistan. *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* was smuggled out of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region in December 2001 and serialised by the London-based, Arabic and English language newspaper Al-Sharaq Al-Aswat in early 2002. Although the pamphlet is not written as a coherent whole there are several useful sections that explain and justify the actions of one strain of the international Islamists following the *jihad* in Afghanistan. It also sets out the future direction for the Islamists and so has earned the moniker 'al-Qaeda's manifesto.' Whilst Qutb's grand narrative of the inevitable and inexorable clash of Islam and *jahiliyya* still provides the overall framework for Zawahiri's interpretation of the ideology he introduces some novel features and provides a distinctive new orientation for the new century. The two most striking features of Zawahiri's contribution are the explicit reorientation towards the U.S. as the principal target for the international Islamists and the endorsement of the use of terrorism as the preferred tactic.³⁹

The explanation and justification for these new directions can be broken down into four interlocking strands. The first and broadest form of justification for the Islamists' new target

³⁷ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

³⁸ Marc Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks* p.22

³⁹ Zawahiri avoids using the word 'terrorism' to avoid its obvious pejorative connotations and instead prefers the phrase 'martyrdom operations.' We use the word 'terrorism,' divorced from any moral judgement, according to our previously settled upon definition: "Violence, deliberately directed against noncombatants, for political or related ends."

is based on the Qutbian paradigm of the existential battle of Islam and *jahiliyya*. However, demonstrating the influence of Azzam, Zawahiri expresses this in terms of Islam under attack from the West, thereby necessitating a defensive *jihad*. By cleverly incorporating the clichéd, pejorative language utilized by Western politicians, academics and media, to denigrate the Islamists Zawahiri claims: 'The western forces that are hostile to Islam have clearly identified their enemy. They refer to it as Islamic fundamentalism.'⁴⁰ Another feature of Zawahiri's contribution to a familiar narrative is his use of a conspiratorial mode of language to describe the omnipresent enemy and their nefarious tactics.⁴¹ He states that there is a 'global Jewish government' acting as a puppet master behind the United States, who, after realising that 'Islam is the popular demand of the nations of this [Arabic] region ... the United States has decided to dictate its wishes by force, repression, forgery, and misinformation ... finally it has added direct military intervention to all the foregoing methods.'⁴²

The second strand of Zawahiri's Islamist ideology is the symbolic importance that he attaches to the existence of Israel and the support that it receives from the U.S. Although Zionism and Israel had been important to the previous generations of Egyptian Islamists it had always been of secondary importance to the domestic struggle and was primarily used as a demonstration of the impotence of secular Arab governments in their attempts to destroy the Jewish state. This can be most clearly seen in the notable absence of the question of Israel in Qutb's *Milestones*. With the relocation of the Egyptian Islamists to Pakistan and the globalisation of the ideology, and the internationalization of the movement's activists, Zawahiri recognised that it was necessary to re-centre the movement so that it remained anchored in the real world. He recognised that without the permanency of a fixed geographical base the *jihadists* would be directionless, it was crucial, therefore, to have an imagined centre that would serve in the place of Egypt as an enduring and unifying force for the displaced Islamists. Azzam had already identified Palestine as the 'beating heart' of the *jihadists* but Zawahiri built on this by forging U.S. foreign policy and their ideological, political, financial and military support for Israel into a singular insoluble nexus.

The third strand of Zawahiri's reasoning offers a more direct justification for targeting the U.S. than the first two more abstract arguments. In *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁴⁰ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁴¹ Steve Bruce *Fundamentalism* p.111

⁴² Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

Zawahiri is convinced of the imperative to establish an 'Islamic' state. The need for a permanent, physical base is both a necessary means and an end for the Islamist movement. This goal is so important that Zawahiri claims that failure to achieve the 'ultimate goal of establishing the Muslim nation in the heart of the Islamic world,' would mean that 'the successful operations against Islam's enemies and the severe damage inflicted on them ... will be nothing more than disturbing acts, regardless of their magnitude, that could be absorbed and endured.'⁴³ Zawahiri's concern with securing a permanent base for the Islamist movement was rooted in pragmatism. Just as he tried to re-centre the imagined focus onto Israel in order to anchor the global movement, he reasoned that only by obtaining a physical base could a deterritorialized movement be organizationally grounded. He wrote that 'a Jihadi movement needs an arena that would act like an incubator where its seeds would grow and where it can acquire practical experience in combat, politics, and organizational matters.'⁴⁴ Zawahiri's ambition for attaining a base was not entirely based on practical grounds but was also motivated by an ideological impulse. He inherited from Qutb the belief that no existing land was truly Islamic as *jahili* concepts and practices had infiltrated and irredeemably corrupted the notional Muslim world. Only by starting afresh could an authentic Islamic society and state be established and from whose example the rest of the Muslim world could be guided and rejuvenated. In this respect Zawahiri briefly mentions the need to restart the institution of the 'rational caliphate' that would provide a central authority for the *umma*.⁴⁵

The imperative to secure and Islamize a piece of land provided the fourth important justification for the targeting of the United States and its interests abroad. Zawahiri's narrative—couched in his characteristic conspiratorial language—argued that the major obstacle between the Islamist movement, and its goal of securing a base, was the U.S., either acting directly on its own, or with its allies in the Muslim world. Just as Britain used to be the principle imperial actor, frustrating the ambitions of al-Banna in the early 20th century, now the Americans prevented the establishment of a true Islamic state.⁴⁶ This narrative acts in conjunction with the other components of Zawahiri's ideology to reconceptualise the Islamists' cause within an interconnected globalized structure. Zawahiri was determined to

⁴³ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁴⁴ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁴⁵ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁴⁶ Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* p.60

settle the dualist distinction between local and global, or the internal and external enemy, that had torn the Jihad grouping of the EIJ and *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* apart. Accordingly it was counterproductive to distinguish between the Egyptian government and the Americans (or the Saudis and Americans) as they effectively act as one against the Islamists. 'The struggle for the establishment of the Muslim state,' Zawahiri explains, 'cannot be considered a regional struggle, certainly not after it had been ascertained that ... the crusader alliance led by the United States will not allow any Muslim force to reach power in the Arab countries.'⁴⁷

A crucial contribution that Zawahiri made to the remodelling of the Islamist ideology is his comprehensive justification for acts of terrorism, and claims of their utility, in pursuit of the Islamist goals. There are three grounds that Zawahiri uses to justify the use of terrorist tactics, or 'martyrdom operations' as he euphemistically describes them. The first is on the grounds of efficacy—faced with a much more powerful enemy the weaker party must employ an indirect means of fighting. Terrorism requires the expenditure of a small number of committed activists, who are prepared to give up their lives as part of the operation, thus resulting in a high success rate. The resulting benefit of the violence is often disproportionately large, therefore, using a crude cost-benefit analysis, Zawahiri concludes that 'the method of the martyrdom operations as the most successful in inflicting damage on the opponent and the least costly in terms of casualties among the Islamists.'⁴⁸ Zawahiri argues for the effectiveness of a war of attrition where the weaker force continuously provokes the stronger and in doing so wears down their material resources and their political and moral resolve. Comparing the U.S. superpower to a volcano Zawahiri writes: 'The persistence of the resistance will keep the volcano in a state of continual eruption and ready to blow up at the least provocation.'⁴⁹

The second is an argument from ethical equivocacy—the United States and its allies employ despicable tactics including torture, imprisonment without trial and other brutal acts of violence, on a greater scale, against the Islamists, therefore they are justified in using similar tactics. 'We must acknowledge,' writes Zawahiri, 'that the west, led by the United States, which is under the influence of the Jews, does not know the language of ethics, morality, and legitimate rights. They only know the language of interests backed by brute military force.'

⁴⁷ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁴⁸ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁴⁹ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

Therefore, if we wish to have a dialogue with them and make them aware of our rights, we must talk to them in the language that they understand.⁵⁰ The third argument, that Zawahiri apparently thought of as the weakest justification and therefore only briefly mentions, is that as the United States, and its Western allies including Israel, are democracies, the citizens of those countries are legitimate targets as they either voted in their governments, and are therefore responsible for their actions, or they can, in principle, remove the administration, but have not done so.⁵¹

4.2.7 Dispute between Azzam and Zawahiri

Towards the end of the Afghan *jihad* a rivalry developed between Azzam and Zawahiri over whose vision would guide the globalised Islamist movement into the future. This took the form of a competition between the two men for influence over bin Laden with his organizational skills, funding streams and the database of contacts that he had created in al-Qaeda. The dispute was as much a power struggle as an ideological one, but it is the doctrinal differences that concern us here. For Azzam the scope of the *jihad* after Afghanistan was drawn along 'more limited and defensive' lines than that of Zawahiri.⁵² He argued in his magazine *Al Jihad* that fighting only became obligatory when the enemy occupied Muslim land, and was not, as Qutb and Zawahiri claimed, a struggle that extended over the entire globe.⁵³ Azzam also objected to *jihadists* interfering in the internal politics of Islamic states and during the Afghanistan campaign insisted on targeting only the Soviets not the Afghan government. Zawahiri by contrast ultimately wished to depose of the leaders of Muslim lands who did not rule by the tenets of Islam.

The epicentre of the future *jihad* was, for Azzam, Jerusalem; for Zawahiri it was Cairo. Azzam recognised the danger of *fitna* in the Muslim *umma* that would inevitably result if the *jihadists* carried their campaigns to Muslim communities. In particular Azzam held the longstanding Sunni reservation over the practice of pronouncing *takfir*—the declaration of non-belief against a fellow Muslim that forfeited their life—that he believed Zawahiri and his followers were employing. Finally, Azzam objected to some of the military training that was

⁵⁰ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

⁵¹ Johnny Ryan "The Four P- Words of Militant Islamist Radicalization and Recruitment: Persecution, Precedent, Piety, and Perseverance"

⁵² Fawaz Gerges *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* p.135

⁵³ Fawaz Gerges *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* p.135

taking place in one of bin Laden's camps near Peshawar that included instruction on the hijacking of aeroplanes, a tactic that Azzam considered terroristic and illegitimate according to *shar'ia*. He pronounced in a *fatwa* that the deliberate killing of civilians, and in particular women and children, was against Islam.⁵⁴ The outcome of the battle between these two visions for the future of direction of the Islamist *jihād* and the competition over bin Laden's mind, would eventually decide the ideological framework of al-Qaeda.⁵⁵

Osama bin Laden had been taken under the wing of Azzam when he arrived in Afghanistan and it was reported that their relationship was that of a student to a professor.⁵⁶ As the *jihād* proceeded and bin Laden's reputation for bravery in the field was established it became clear that bin Laden's ambitions exceeded those of his mentor. Eventually bin Laden moved away from Azzam's conception of a limited and defensive international *jihād*ist force and drew closer to the vision of his rival. Zawahiri still harboured the hope for the overthrow of the Egyptian government with a swift *coup d'état* with the aim of establishing an Islamic state. Having reached a dead end after the assassination of Sadat and the splintering of the indigenous Islamist movement he reached the conclusion that a radically new methodology was required and he sought to find this in the new internationalist movement that developed in Afghanistan. Crucial to this venture was the networks and funding that bin Laden could provide, and eventually, bin Laden sided with Zawahiri. Whatever the intricacies of the internal dispute the matter was settled a few months after the Soviet withdrawal when Azzam and his two sons were assassinated by three landmines as they drove to a mosque on November 24th, 1989. Although it is tempting to interpret the assassination in the light of the unfolding rivalry for bin Laden's patronage, there is no conclusive evidence unveiling the identity of the perpetrators of the attack. In any case it is clear that the international Islamists did not search too hard to uncover the identity of the assassins. The divisions that would have inevitably occurred in the aftermath of such a discovery could have severely damaged the unity of an already dangerously factious movement.

4.3 The Twin Islamist Movements under Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri

⁵⁴ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.130

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Haynes "Al Qaeda: Ideology and Action" pp.76-77

⁵⁶ Fawaz Gerges *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* p.134

With the removal of Azzam and the retreat of the Soviets, the shape of the international Islamist movement, gathered under the two major groupings of EIJ and al-Qaeda, was determined by the leadership of bin Laden under the ideological influence of Zawahiri. The picture that we have of this period is one of the disintegration and decentralization of the international Islamists. Although sporadic lines of communication and loyalties were maintained by some with the central groups of al-Qaeda and EIJ the idea that they were active 'organizations' in is misleading. In particular Zawahiri seems to become increasingly distant from bin Laden until circumstances forced the two back together in 1997.

The experience of the Islamists in Afghanistan demonstrated that the battlefield did not necessarily provide a safe haven for the Islamists during the conflict or a welcoming home following the end of hostilities. This period is therefore marked by the lack of a clear ideological direction and the contradiction between the imperatives of actively pursuing *jihād* and survival. We can thus observe a move away from the grounded and pragmatic *jihād* envisaged by Azzam, towards the Qutbian inspired transcendent and symbolically-orientated ideology of Zawahiri and bin Laden. To put it in Weberian terminology there was a shift from instrumental to value rationality. This latest ideological evolution would witness a shift from a concern with short-term political and economic issues towards a consistent preoccupation with the timeless and fundamental conflict of 'religion and antireligion.'⁵⁷ It would, however, be a mistake to push this point too far. Bin Laden, as we shall see, did not see al-Qaeda operating in an otherworldly dimension and was certainly not oblivious to the political, social and economic forces within which he operated. Olivier Roy makes this mistake when he argues that bin Laden's 'aim is simply to destroy Babylon'⁵⁸ and that there is a 'lack of genuine strategic goals.'⁵⁹ A more accurate characterisation of his ideology would therefore recognise his tendency to morph or frame real world political events and strategies into a transcendent, polarised framework of belief against unbelief. Above all bin Laden was keenly aware of the emotional pull of a Qutbian grand narrative and the harmonising and unifying force it could potentially exert on the consciousness of the global *umma*. Bin Laden not only endeavoured to operate within this ideological framework, but also, through his actions, to bring it into being for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

⁵⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer *Terror In The Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* p.157

⁵⁸ Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* p.57

⁵⁹ Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* p.325

The intermediary gestation period saw the Islamists travel around the world in search of places where the *jihad*, in the Afghan mould, could be continued. The obvious conflicts were those clashes involving Muslim and non-Muslim forces in irregular warfare or insurgency-type conflict. In the 1990s this included, amongst others: Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir and Algeria. All of these conflicts shared a basic property: they were all examples, in the minds of the Islamists of the occupation of Muslim lands by a non-Muslim invader. Thus, whether as a result of a conscious decision or not, the Islamists' identification of arenas of *jihad* had shifted from Qutb's unrestricted global battleground to Azzam's more limited delineation of occupied Muslim lands.

During the 1990s we begin to see the first signs of yet another splintering in the movement between those who saw the ideological future of the movement in Azzam's ideology and those who aligned themselves with the new Islamist ideology forged by Zawahiri and bin Laden. The imperative to continue the campaign of *jihad* was tempered by Zawahiri's pragmatic search for a safe haven for the movement. As a return to Egypt was excluded by the threat of persecution and incarceration or worse—many of the leaders, including Zawahiri, were sentenced to death *in absentia* during the 1990s—the core of the bin Laden's and Zawahiri's followers moved to Sudan and Yemen. These countries were geographically close enough to Egypt and the Middle East so that Zawahiri could continue to exercise some control over al-Qaeda and EIJ. Crucially the governments of these countries were too weak, wracked by their own civil wars and internal power struggles, to bother the Islamists and tolerated their presence in exchange for the economic investment that bin Laden brought along with the tacit agreement that the Islamists would not challenge their sovereignty.

4.3.1 Creation of the Taliban

Before we advance to study the creation of al-Qaeda it will be useful to tie up the historic loose ends of the Afghan conflict and the formation of the Taliban. The communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan did not fall following the withdrawal of Soviet troops but consolidated into the major cities and towns. As a result the previously unified insurrection collapsed into competing ethnic and tribal factions led by local warlords and the country descended into a period of civil war.⁶⁰ In this complex climate the role of the Islamists as

⁶⁰ Montasser al-Zayyat *The Road To al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right Hand Man* p.55

foreign fighters became unclear and although they continued to fight against the beleaguered government their increasingly bloody style of warfare following the fall of Kabul in 1992 alienated them from the various indigenous *mujahedeen* groups and the civilian population.⁶¹ Any last vestiges of the Arab-Afghans seeped away with the arrival of the Taliban who finally put an end to the civil war. Under the leadership of Mullah Omar, the Taliban (literally 'students') were composed principally of Pashtun boys who had been educated in Saudi-sponsored Deobandi madrassas in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. These were young men from poor families who had been displaced by the fighting in the wake of the Soviet invasion and had received a Salafist education in the madrassas that doubled up as boarding houses and schools. Their isolated upbringing, cut-off from their family and traditional tribal structures, meant that they were loyal only to their teachers and thus were able to mobilise quickly and effectively at the end 1994 and captured Kabul two years later.⁶² In the areas that the Taliban controlled a strict and unorthodox version of *shar'ia* was implemented and enforced by the newly created religious police.⁶³

Despite superficial religious affinities, in ideological terms the Taliban, with their ultra-conservative and Salafist interpretation of Islam, were very different from the outward-looking radical Islamists. The Taliban were only concerned with ending the civil war and creating a perfect Islamic state based on the Wahhabi teachings of their madrassas. The internal politics and economics of their own country did not overly concern them and the opium trade was allowed to grow subjected only to an informal export tax on the outgoing shipments. The centre of power similarly shifted from the government buildings of Kabul to the religious seminaries of Kandahar. As disinterested as the Taliban were in their non-religious internal affairs they were even less concerned with international politics. Clearly, Qutb's globalized and radically utopian Islamism was of an entirely different scope and trajectory to the Taliban's inward-looking Islamic state. Despite their ideological incongruities the Taliban and al-Qaeda were able to forge a strategic alliance upon the Islamists' return to Afghanistan after their expulsion from Sudan in 1996.

⁶¹ Thomas Johnson and M. Chris Mason "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan"

⁶² Thomas Johnson and M. Chris Mason "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan"

⁶³ A frequently quoted list of forbidden items according to the Taliban's version of *shar'ia* demonstrates their esoteric, insular and anti-modern approach to government and Islam: '[Forbidden items include:] pork, pig, pig oil, anything made from human hair, satellite dishes, cinematography, any equipment that produces the joy of music, pool tables, chess, masks, alcohol, tapes, computers, VCRs, televisions, anything that propagates sex and is full of music, wine, lobster, nail polish, firecrackers, statues, sewing catalogs, pictures, Christmas cards.'

Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.231

4.4 Formation of al-Qaeda

Whilst some Islamists continued their struggle as freelance *jihadists* in various conflicts another distinct strand was developing in the formation and evolution of al-Qaeda. Unlike Zawahiri, bin Laden was still a well respected figure in his homeland of Saudi Arabia. His father, who had died several years earlier in a plane crash, had created the Bin Laden Group, an engineering conglomerate that won many of the prestigious civil engineering contracts from the Saud family including the refurbishment of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Having not yet fallen out with the Saudi establishment his outlook for the international *jihadists* was quite different from that of Zawahiri. Although much has been written about the formative period of al-Qaeda's development the details are often contradictory and because of its covert mode of operation little can be known for certain.⁶⁴ However what we shall attempt to understand here is the ideological development of this strand of the Islamist movement and the intimately related organizational changes.

In contrast to Zawahiri's advocacy of terrorism bin Laden preferred the sustained pressure of irregular warfare tactics in line with the model utilized in the Afghan *jihad*. In bin Laden's mind the Islamists would form a dedicated vanguard to be used in cooperation with Muslim governments to advance the Islamist cause around the world. Al-Qaeda al-Askariya (the military base) was formally created in Peshawar in August 1988 as the administrative and executive nucleus of the imagined vanguard.⁶⁵ One distinctive feature was that al-Qaeda members, who at its conception numbered fewer than 100, swore a *ba'yah* to bin Laden who became the undisputed *emir* (leader) of the group. The ceremony of fealty not only cemented the loyalty and hierarchy of the group but also purposefully echoed the *ba'yah* that the Prophet Mohammad's followers swore when they joined Islam.

Osama bin Laden returned to Jeddah as a popular folk hero in the middle of 1989 credited with—alongside the Arab-Afghans—having brought down the Soviet empire. Tales of his exploits in Afghanistan—and his social standing as a member of the respected and well-connected bin Laden family along with the contacts that he had created as a conduit for funds

⁶⁴ See Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*; Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*; Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon *The Next Attack: The Globalization of Jihad* for a range of perspectives on al-Qaeda's history.

⁶⁵ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* pp.131-134

for the *mujahedeen* meant that he had privileged access to the royal family and was warmly welcomed back. What bin Laden lacked, however, was a cause on which he could put into practice his vision of an Islamist vanguard. His patience was not tested for long; within a few months of his arrival home the leaders of north and south Yemen—having long been embroiled in a civil war—signed a unification treaty creating the Republic of Yemen in May 1990. Bin Laden had been alarmed at what he saw as a Marxist government in South Yemen in his father’s ancestral homeland and had approached Prince Turki—the head of Saudi intelligence—with the offer of overthrowing the government.⁶⁶ This was the first chance that bin Laden spotted to put al-Qaeda into action. At this point the model of al-Qaeda in bin Laden’s mind was one of elite Islamist irregulars that could be mobilised anywhere on the global stage—in the service of an Islamic country—as a vanguard against the encroaching forces of communism and Western secularism. The offer was politely refused by the Prince who was disturbed by the idea of a freelance Islamist army with its own personal foreign policy and bin Laden’s talk of ‘my mujahedeen.’⁶⁷

Bin Laden was not so easily deterred and began to covertly sponsor armed raids from the north against the south even after the unification agreement had been signed. With the new Republic on the brink of breaking up the president protested directly to king Fahd of Saudi Arabia to bring bin Laden into line. The head of the Saud family passed on these instructions but bin Laden, in defiance of the regal command ignored him and escalated the campaign of political assassinations. Once again the Yemenite head pleaded with the king, and this time, furious with bin Laden’s disobedience, sent Prince Naif—who had previously worked with bin Laden in the Afghanistan campaign—to confiscate his passport.⁶⁸ This was the beginning of an escalating friction between the Saudi establishment and bin Laden eventually reshaping al-Qaeda’s agenda from the relative conservatism of a vanguard working in the service of Islamic states to a radical ideology that sought to depose those same governments. The Yemenite quarrel, however, was soon eclipsed by far more significant and spectacular events in the height of the summer the following year.

4.4.1 Iraqi Occupation of Kuwait

⁶⁶ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda’s Road to 9/11* p.153

⁶⁷ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda’s Road to 9/11* p.153

⁶⁸ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda’s Road to 9/11* p.154

With the invasion of Kuwait on August 2nd, 1990 the Arab world was split between the triumphant display of Arab defiance and strength represented by Iraq, and their loyalty and dependence on Saudi Arabia. Saddam Hussein's explosive mix of popularist Islamism and third-world ideology, anti-American and anti-Zionist vitriol, stood in stark contrast the long-standing sponsor of Islamic conservatism, and guarantor of economic and political stability represented by the Saud royal family. Despite years and billions of dollars spent by the Saud royal family on cultivating its Wahhabi credentials of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy when the dust settled in Kuwait City the Saudi's were shocked to discover how fragile their political base had become. The challenge to the Islamic credentials of the Saud family came, ironically, from a man whose power base rested on the secular Ba'ath party and whose own ideology was closer to pan-Arabism than Islamism. Although Saddam Hussein had adopted Islamist slogans during the eight years of stalemate in the Iran-Iraq war, his religious legitimacy was undermined by his propensity to attack other Muslim states, which, in this instance, was manifested in Iraq's annexation of their neighbour Kuwait.

Despite the swift condemnations of Hussein's belligerence the greater concern for the international community was the direct and immediate threat to the rich oil fields of eastern Saudi Arabia. Saddam's rhetoric justifying the annexation of Kuwait was imbued with Islamic slogans and the populist theme of Islam's yearning for justice against the aggressive neo-imperialism of America. According to his narrative Kuwait was an artificial construct of the British Empire designed to divide and restrict the economic and geopolitical power of the Arabs, a system that was now maintained by U.S. military and economic power to ensure access to oil and subdue the restive impulse of Islam. Hussein accused the emirs of the Al Sabah family of expropriating the wealth of the region to enrich themselves at the expense of its citizens in particular and the Arabs in general; a theme that could also be easily levelled against the Saud family. In a televised broadcast of Hussein praying on the shore of Kuwait City Saddam spoke directly to the frustrations ordinary, disenfranchised Arab people, presenting himself as the natural leader of a 'moral and social jihad.'⁶⁹ This contrasted starkly with years of elite and aloof hypocritical decadence that the princes and emirs of the Saud family had revelled in whilst imposing a strict and repressive Wahhabist doctrine on the populace.

⁶⁹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.208

With the invitation of American troops to defend the Saudi border in Operation Desert Shield former staunch allies were forced to decide where their ultimate loyalties rested. In the Arab world the 'Palestinians, Sudanese, Algerians, Libyans, Tunisians, Yemenis and ... Jordanians openly supported Saddam Hussein.'⁷⁰ The fissures that were created in the edifice of Saudi orthodox hegemony would eventually force bin Laden to make a choice that had repeatedly split the Islamist movement in the past. He could either join his former sponsors and work within the legitimate confines of the Saudi state; or turn against it and continue his Islamist career as a persecuted outsider and outlaw. At this point bin Laden's financial ties, loyalties and faith in his homeland meant that he was not yet ready to cross over this boundary; however the unfolding events of the next few months would compel him into taking an unambiguous and irreversible stance.

4.4.2 Bin Laden's Offers of Support in the Gulf War

Immediately following the invasion of Kuwait bin Laden made a plea directly to the king imploring him not to call on American troops. Although the royal family was initially divided on the matter, the promise given by the then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, that the troops would leave when the threat had subsided, convinced the king to accept the American forces. A few weeks later a despairing bin Laden again approached the Saudi regime with a plan to defend the peninsula using his own shock troops and to rapidly raise and mobilise an army of irregular Muslim volunteers.⁷¹ Whatever the political and propaganda utility that an all-Muslim force represented king Fahd knew that an untrained and ill-equipped army would be decimated by Hussein's mechanized and professional standing forces. He pointed out to bin Laden that 'there are no caves in Kuwait' and was unimpressed by his promise to fight the Iraqis 'with faith.'⁷²

Having been spurned twice by the Saudis, bin Laden's disappointment and anger was intensified when the government put pressure on the clergy to issue *fatwas* justifying the arrival of the infidel soldiers in the land that the Prophet, on his deathbed, forbade the presence of two religions. In just a few weeks approximately five-hundred thousand mixed sex American and coalition troops, including their Christian and Jewish chaplains, along with

⁷⁰ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.156

⁷¹ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.157

⁷² Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.157

an entourage of hundreds of international journalists reporting on the build-up to the confrontation with Saddam arrived. Although they were quartered in bases outside of the cities their sheer number, combined with the intensive and intrusive press coverage, and meant that they would be a very public and conspicuous presence in what had previously been a closed and private society.

For ordinary Saudis, depending on one's social and political standing, the presence of foreign troops had either a humiliating or liberating effect, but in both cases served to weaken the royal family's authoritarian control over society. This emboldened the progressive liberals, prompting several women in Riyadh to publicly break the informal norm that banned female drivers. At the other extreme the more reactionary clerics who composed an open 'Letter of Demands' with a list of stipulations to further Islamise the state, redistribute power to the *ulema*, implement strict conformity to *shar'ia* and create an 'Islamic army' through the conscription of young males.⁷³ The foreign troops polarized the conservative clerics and the progressive liberals, and brought to the surface tensions that had been previously suppressed under a veil of silence by the repressive royal family in collaboration with the compliant *ulema*. The rebellious clerics were unable and unwilling to directly confront the Saudi establishment but the public provocation of the female drivers provided an easy surrogate target for their complaints of the spread of corrupting Western liberal decadence.

As the defensive mission of Operation Desert Shield evolved into the offensive Operation Desert Storm the situation became intolerable for bin Laden. He had been fervently lobbying for his passport to be returned on the pretext that he could travel to Afghanistan to mediate an end to the escalating civil war. The authorities finally conceded but only returned his papers on the condition that bin Laden signed a document stating that he would not interfere in Saudi affairs again.⁷⁴ He departed for Peshawar in March 1992 and briefly entered into the negotiations conducted between the two leading warlords Massoud and Hekmatyar and the representatives of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The talks collapsed when Massoud's forces covertly occupied Kabul provoking a violent backlash by Hekmatyar. Bin Laden found himself backing the opposite side to the Saud's preferred proxy leader—Hekmatyar—and, now fearing for his life, slipped out of Pakistan to hide in Afghanistan. It was, however, too dangerous for the dissident to stay for too long. Fortuitously the Islamist *coup* in Sudan, led

⁷³ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.160

⁷⁴ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.161

by Omar al-Bashir and the charismatic leader of the National Islamic Front party Hasan al-Turabi, had extended an invitation of a safe haven for bin Laden and his followers, in exchange for the considerable engineering expertise and investments that he could still provide. In the middle of 1992 he once again relocated, this time to Khartoum and another critical juncture was reached in the ideological and organizational evolution of al-Qaeda.

4.4.3 Al-Qaeda's Incubation in Sudan

Bin Laden was not the first Islamist guest in Sudan. Zawahiri's EIJ had also begun to gather there and had been buying up land south of Khartoum to replace the training camps lost after the evacuation of Afghanistan. Bin Laden moved into one of these farms with his family of four wives and several children and the inner circle of al-Qaeda members. Although a training camp was established it seems that this was for relatively low-level small arms and explosives training.⁷⁵ The militant activity of al-Qaeda was wound down during this period as bin Laden concentrated on winning big civil engineering projects and establishing his family's Bin Laden Group presence in Sudan. He used the proceeds of these lucrative contracts to buy large swathes of farming land and create numerous small start-up companies. At this point al-Qaeda represented a diverse business empire with trusted members being awarded managerial positions in the group's various concerns. The sense of divine purpose that had inspired bin Laden to establish al-Qaeda in Afghanistan was now lacking in Sudan. His idealistic vision of an international Islamist brigade had foundered on the rocks of Saudi politics; al-Qaeda became a group without a mission. The lack of direction, combined with the pleasures of running a successful business and farming group, meant that for a few years it seemed likely that bin Laden would retire his more radical Islamist ambitions and settle into the comfortable rhythm of his Sudanese family life.

4.4.4 Al-Qaeda as an Islamist Funding Body

Whilst temporarily subdued bin Laden's Islamist passions did not die out altogether and his numerous contacts with international *jihadists* meant that he was never entirely cut off from the Islamist currents that were flowing around the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda's model, insofar as it was involved in Islamist activities during the early Sudanese period, was one where

⁷⁵ Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* pp.72-73

groups or organisations would arrange a meeting with bin Laden and his inner circle to apply for funding for a particular specific operation or cause. This would then be considered by the al-Qaeda committee and the application would be accepted, modified or rejected. The money that was distributed to external groups would be considered seed-funding rather than an open-ended commitment to finance an entire campaign.⁷⁶ One example of this process is the funding that was provided to two Algerian Islamists who approached al-Qaeda in the early 1990s and won forty thousand dollars of funding. At the start of 1992 the cancelling by the army of the second round of a democratic election where the Islamic Salvation Front—an Islamist party—were likely to be returned to power, resulted in a violent civil war. The Islamist factions, primarily the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), fought an increasingly violent campaign that began by targeting Francophone politicians, officials, police, non-Muslims and intellectuals but escalated into the indiscriminate butchering of entire village populations. Although bin Laden initially funded the movement, he eventually balked at the incredible intensive mindless brutality of the GIA and withdrew his support, claiming that it sullied the image of Islamists.⁷⁷

Bin Laden noted the lack of focus and discipline in Algeria and the violence that had taken on a logic of its own. Although the later terrorist actions initiated by him tended towards the transcendent-symbolic mode he never understood violence as solely an end in itself. His background in business meant that he viewed terrorism primarily within the instrumental rational framework of cost-benefit analysis. Each operation represented a certain cost, both in human and capital terms, and was expected to produce a result larger than the cost. Certain types of actions, bin Laden speculated, for example suicide operations or spectacular bombings, had a disproportionate outcome, thus increasing the marginal profit. The Afghanistan *jihad* had proved to be the example *par excellence* of this idea. From bin Laden's perspective a relatively modest amount of funding and manpower, in the form of the Arab-Afghans and *mujahedeen* had managed, when efficiently organized and focused on their task, to not only cause the evacuation of one of the world's greatest armies, but had also precipitated the collapse of the entire Soviet empire. For bin Laden and the Afghan Arabs this represented an almost unimaginable achievement. Aside from the theological explanations of this extraordinary victory, bin Laden identified the use of repeated and unrelenting irregular warfare tactics as having acted as a force multiplier—to use Western military jargon—that

⁷⁶ Marc Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks* p.110

⁷⁷ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* pp.189-190

had brought about the Islamist's success. The technologically advanced but soulless and atheist Soviet monolith had been politically and economically unable to tolerate the thousands of small cuts inflicted by the divinely-inspired Islamists.

4.4.5 Al-Qaeda in Somalia

The chance to affirm his theory arose a year later in Somalia. The civil war that had begun in 1991 resulted in the arrival of a UN peacekeeping taskforce charged with averting a humanitarian catastrophe compounded by famine in the south. The Americans, as the lead force, presented bin Laden with the opportunity to avenge the humiliation of the continued presence of foreign troops in his ancestral homeland. Just as with the Afghan *jihad* the historical facts of the events that followed are of less importance than the mythological narrative they were woven into. It seems that bin Laden sent a handful of al-Qaeda fighters to assist the Somali insurgents in their efforts to expel the UN forces. They were to provide training in bomb-making and other guerrilla warfare activities but were reportedly unsuccessful in this role.⁷⁸ On October 3rd, 1993 their luck changed; two al-Qaeda operatives witnessed the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters by rocket-propelled grenades marking the beginning of the Battle of Mogadishu that resulted in the deaths of eighteen U.S. soldiers and several hundred Somali militia fighters and citizens in the ensuing rescue mission.⁷⁹

The loss of life and the televised images of the bodies of American soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu marked the turning point for support of the humanitarian intervention. A few months later in March 1994 all of the U.S. troops were withdrawn, swiftly followed by the evacuation of the remainder of the UN forces. For bin Laden and his supporters the narrative and its parallels with the Afghan *jihad* were easy to draw. A small cadre of dedicated Islamist warriors and the deaths of just a few U.S. soldiers had managed to precipitate the evacuation of the sole remaining superpower that had looked, just two years earlier, triumphant and invincible in the Gulf War.⁸⁰ The difference between the Soviets and the Americans was that the former had managed to sustain far greater losses over an eight year period before withdrawing from Afghanistan; but for the Americans it took only a single bloody loss. The conclusion that bin Laden barely needed to draw was that the American

⁷⁸ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.188

⁷⁹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.317

⁸⁰ M.J. Akbar *The Shade of Swords: Jihad and the Conflict Between Islam and Christianity* p.208

state and society were so decadent and internally corrupt that the illusion of its power could be shattered with a few, well directed blows. The democratic openness of the West made them more vulnerable to the images of loss and destruction that terrorism could create; this was an idea that would ferment in bin Laden's mind for the following few years.

4.4.6 Hosni Mubarak Assassination Plot

In June 1995 the old Jihad alliance of EIJ and *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* was resurrected for an assassination attempt on the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak.⁸¹ With the cooperation of Sudanese intelligence officials, Zawahiri conspired with members of *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* to kill the president on his trip to a meeting in Addis Ababa. The plotters reasoned that the resulting power vacuum would offer an opportunity to seize power in the forthcoming Egyptian elections. Hasan al-Turabi secretly approved of the plan as he hoped that it would allow him to export his Islamist revolution to Sudan's northern neighbour. The leader of the conspiracy was a senior al-Qaeda member, Mustafa Hamza, and given his role it seems likely that bin Laden either actively aided with the planning or at least gave his consent. The style of the proposed ambush of the president's car certainly fitted in with the *modus operandi* of al-Qaeda with its calculated aim of destroying a high-value target using a minimal human and capital cost in the expectation of disproportionately profitable outcome—the Islamization of Egypt. The operation also seemed to be inspired by bin Laden's belief that non-Islamic political systems are inherently unstable and can therefore be toppled with a crisis induced by a sudden shock applied to the correct place. Finally, apart from the utilitarian considerations, the symbolic value of assassinating Mubarak would not have been lost on bin Laden. He represented, in common with other Arabic leaders, the repression, corruption, weakness and hypocrisy of a government that dresses itself in the legitimising garbs of Islam but fails to rule by its tenets and had recognised, and even normalised its relations with, Israel.

Whatever the expectations of bin Laden, the al-Jihad cooperative and Turabi the ambush was unsuccessful when a grenade-launcher failed and Mubarak escaped with his life. The actual outcome of the assassination attempt therefore was very different from the one envisaged by the conspirators. Not only did it lead to a new, vigorous wave of persecutions of Islamists in Egypt but once the involvement of Sudan had been established—a fact that Turabi made no

⁸¹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.317

attempt to deny—there was an international outcry denouncing the leader who had previously been tolerated by the international community. Although protestations of Sudan's innocence came from lower level officials, Turabi's public praise for the would-be assassins sealed the country's fate and a UN resolution was passed imposing economic sanctions on the already struggling state. In Egypt over the next four years an estimated 20,000 suspected members or supporters of *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* were rounded up with many being incarcerated in new-purpose built detention centres effectively crippling the group and eventually leading directly to the 1997 cease-fire initiative.⁸² The Egyptian authorities knew, however, that it would be insufficient to only subdue the Islamists at home. They had learnt from a plot that had been devised in Sudan, by several groups whose membership was composed of different nationalities, and staged in Ethiopia that the Islamist movements now operated on the global stage.

4.4.7 Expulsion from Sudan

Pressure from Egypt eventually forced Sudan to expel Zawahiri and EIJ; however bin Laden as an important businessman was allowed to stay. Having failed to directly pressurise Sudan into punishing bin Laden Egypt changed tact. The ongoing violence in its southern neighbour was a continuous source of instability for the country. Bin Laden was viewed, second only to Zawahiri, as the source of this trouble and the Egyptians complained vociferously to Saudi Arabia to bring their rebellious son under control. For the second time King Fahd ordered that bin Laden's passport be confiscated; however on this occasion he went further, decreeing that his citizenship also be revoked.⁸³ This was the final breaking-point for the strained relationship between bin Laden and the Saud family. Although he had been severely at odds with Saudi foreign policy, in particular with events surrounding the Gulf War, bin Laden still considered himself an exiled loyal citizen of the state and was shocked when an emissary arrived to deliver the news. The actions of Egypt and Saudi Arabia had turned bin Laden away from his idea of international *jihadists* working in conjunction with Muslim governments to Zawahiri's ideological perspective of a direct and irreconcilable conflict with corrupt Islamic regimes.

⁸² Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.215

⁸³ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.195

Osama bin Laden was now on a collision course with the Saud family and the state-sponsored *ulemas* that endowed religious legitimacy on their power. He commissioned the creation of an office in London that composed and distributed by fax countless denunciations of the regime included the familiar litany of accusations of the royal's corruption, decadence and dependency on the Americans. The Saudis responded by ordering the Bin Laden Group to cut off bin Laden from the family company and seize his share of the assets. As diverse as his business interests were in Sudan bin Laden had relied on income from the Bin Laden Group to provide the regular cash flow on which his investments depended. The sudden severing of this source effectively bankrupted bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Starved of the cash flow guaranteed by the income from his family's company the Islamist funding model swiftly collapsed. The extent of the crisis became evident when one member, Jamal al-Fadl, defected and sold his knowledge of al-Qaeda to the CIA, after he was caught siphoning funds from the dwindling reserves.⁸⁴

4.4.8 Riyadh Truck Bomb

The spat between the Saud family and bin Laden finally reached a public climax. In August 1995 he faxed an angry diatribe directly attacking King Fahd and the Saud family going as far as labelling the monarch an *infidel*. The letter included the familiar litany of complaints of the hypocritical disparity between the ostentatious displays of wealth by the royals and their patrons in contrast to the poverty of ordinary Saudis, as well as a scathing attack on the despoilment of the holy peninsular with the continued presence of American soldiers. Although the content was familiar the directness of the attack on King Fahd—including a demand for his abdication—scandalised the Saudi establishment.⁸⁵ The following week a veteran of the Afghan war, who had been convicted of attacking a Saudi official, was summarily executed by the regime. It was a barely veiled response to bin Laden's visceral rhetoric and once again ratcheted up the tension between the two parties. The response came on November 13th, 1995 when a large truck bomb destroyed a Saudi National Guard communications centre in Riyadh that operated with the aid of American military personnel.⁸⁶ The impact of the attack was heightened when six days later Zawahiri's group destroyed the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan, giving the impression of a global network of

⁸⁴ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.197

⁸⁵ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.210

⁸⁶ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.211

Islamists with the capability of striking around the world. Although bin Laden could not be linked directly with the attack the Saudis quickly rounded up several suspects—some of whom had participated in the Afghan *jihād*—and extracted videoed statements out of them to the effect that they had been influenced by bin Laden. After the ‘confessions’ were aired on national television four of the men were publicly beheaded.

The culmination of Saudi, Egyptian and American pressure on Sudan was finally making bin Laden’s presence intolerable. The expulsion of Zawahiri and the severing of his cash lifeline had left the Saudi vulnerable. Without the ability to invest generously in his various Sudanese enterprises there was little economic incentive for his continued presence. This was especially true when weighed against the loss of political capital, economic isolation and the diplomatic freeze that Sudan suffered as a result. Any ideological affinities counted for very little in the face of tangible short-term political and economic costs. Although Sudan resolved to expel bin Laden at the beginning of 1996 it was unclear where he would go. Bin Laden had made many enemies, but at this point he was viewed as the bankroller of Islamist movements rather than the mastermind. The Sudanese offered to hand him over to America but they declined due to a lack of evidence that he had committed a crime against the U.S. or its citizens. The Saudis also refused him after assurances were sought by the Sudanese that he would not be prosecuted.⁸⁷ Furthermore, either out of sense of loyalty to the powerful bin Laden family or a fear of turning bin Laden into a martyr like Qutb, the Saudis did not want to execute him; the benefit of accepting his return was outweighed by the potential costs. Finally, bin Laden was stripped of all his remaining Sudanese assets and on May 18th, 1996 was put on a plane with a few members of his inner circle and his family and was flown to Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan.⁸⁸ The remainder of al-Qaeda members were either dispatched back to their home countries or fled before the authorities could catch them.

4.4.9 Return to Afghanistan

In the end the difficult choice that bin Laden had faced between a comfortable, existence in Sudan and his commitment to the Islamist movement had been made for him. Shorn of most of his material assets bin Laden was now entirely committed to his imagined fate as the leader of the global Islamist revolution. Once more bin Laden recognised, and actively

⁸⁷ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda’s Road to 9/11* pp.221-225

⁸⁸ The 9/11 Commission Report pp.63-65

manipulated the powerful symbolism to establish himself as an Islamist figurehead. Soon after arriving in Jalalabad he was on the move again, relocating to the Tora Bora caves. The rugged caves reflected the refuge that the Prophet had sought on his journey to Medina and bin Laden sought to recast his flight from Khartoum as a latter-day *hijra* (migration).⁸⁹ Bin Laden also contrasted the pure and authentic austerity of his day-to-day existence with the consoling but meaningless trappings of materialism that corrupted the rest of humanity. At the aesthetic level bin Laden's life was now a dramatization of the morality play that had long been played out in the collective imagination of the *jihadists*: true authentic Islam—stripped of all manmade additions and accumulations of history—confronted by, and confronting, Western modernity. Over the next five years bin Laden and al-Qaeda conspired to turn this symbolic confrontation that occupied their minds, and defined their reality, into a real-life struggle that would mesmerise the rest of the world.

At the same time as bin Laden was returning to Afghanistan the Taliban were on the verge of completing their takeover of most of the country and ending the long civil war that had followed the Soviet withdrawal. As we explored earlier the Islamists and the Taliban had quite different ideological outlooks. The uncertainty and mutual suspicion that had prevented a political alliance at the end of the Afghan *jihad* still prevailed when bin Laden arrived uninvited from Sudan. Mullah Omar a veteran of the Soviet campaign and the man, who had emerged as the leader of the Taliban, was initially concerned by the residency of a man with such a noxious international reputation. Although Kabul had not yet fallen Omar recognised that once political control of Afghanistan had been won the Taliban would need regional allies to hold onto power. One of their most important sponsors was Saudi Arabia, who sought a politically stable buffer in Afghanistan as a counterbalance to any Iranian influence, and it was their advice that Omar sought when he heard of bin Laden's arrival. The Saudi response was to stick with the containment strategy that had spectacularly failed with the less pliable Sudan regime—allow bin Laden to stay, but keep him quiet.⁹⁰ Bin Laden's attitude towards the Taliban was broadly based on ignorance. Unaware of who they were, and having been burnt by his alliance with the Sudanese government, he sought to isolate al-Qaeda geographically, materially and politically from the regime but quietly sent out feelers in order to see what could be learnt about the black-turbaned movement.

⁸⁹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.318

⁹⁰ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.226

Although keeping quiet was an important imperative on the local stage—bin Laden did not want to unnecessarily antagonise his hosts—and was well aware of the balance-of-power that meant that he required their tolerance of his presence more than they needed him, he certainly did not plan on a descent into obscurity in the mountains of east Afghanistan. Only one month after his arrival on June 25th, 1996 a massive truck bomb exploded outside the Khobar towers complex in Saudi Arabia resulting in the death of 19 Americans and one Saudi, and injured several hundred others.⁹¹ As the truck had been planted by Lebanese nationals and members of Hezbollah, the attack was linked to Iran. The Saudis, however, also claimed that the wider conspiracy included several Arab veterans of the Afghan *jihad* and so suspicion fell on bin Laden that he had at least known of the attack, even if he had not been actively involved in its planning. The motivation behind the bombing certainly segued with bin Laden's pressing concern with the continued presence of the American servicemen in Saudi Arabia and he praised the attack numerous times in his first major *fatwa* published later that year.

Regardless of the actual extent of bin Laden's involvement with the Khobar attack he was certainly not fulfilling the Saudi directive that demanded his gagging.⁹² Despite the persona that bin Laden actively crafted of a total rejection of modernity he did continue to utilize its technologies to create and disseminate an idealised image. The cave, and later the farm compound, from which he worked was filled with technologies of mass communication: a satellite telephone, faxes, computers and various media recording equipment. Some of the most important skills that bin Laden personally utilized in running al-Qaeda were those of the administrator and propagandist. He was less successful as an original ideologue, and worse as a theologian, tending to haphazardly combine a *salafi* version of Islam with elements of Qutb, Azzam and Zawahiri.⁹³ These strengths and weaknesses were reflected in the two infamous *fatwas* that he released over the next two years.

4.4.10 1996 Fatwa

⁹¹ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.317

⁹² The 9/11 Commission Report p.65

⁹³ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.319

The first *fatwa* published in August 1996 was written by bin Laden and printed by an Arabic-language newspaper based in London.⁹⁴ The lengthy document broadly consists of a list of charges levelled against the Saudi regime in particular, and other Muslim governments in general, and is a call to arms to correct these problems. The substantive rhetoric that conveys the central messages is interspersed with a mixture of quotations from the Qur'an, *hadith*, Ibn Taymiyya and short verses of poetry composed by bin Laden. He recounts the past successes of the Islamist movement claiming that the *jihad* in Afghanistan had destroyed the 'myth of the superpower' and praised the actions of Islamists in Beirut, Somalia and Aden that had forced the U.S. to withdraw after suffering light losses in minor attacks. America, as the sole superpower in the post-Cold War world had become 'like Rome ... degenerate and demoralized, ready to be overthrown.'⁹⁵ The most pressing problem now facing the Islamists was the stationing of U.S. service personnel in the Arabian Peninsula. Their continued presence was both a cause and a symptom of a host of other ills that bin Laden diagnosed in the Saudi political, economic and social systems.

The list of complaints is similar in content to the Letter of Demands that king Fahd had ignored in the lead up to the Gulf War. They include accusations that the royal family had allowed the country's infrastructure to deteriorate, legislated with manmade law instead of *shar'ia*, failed to protect the country by training a competent army and subsequently invited, and continued to host American troops, seriously mismanaged the economy and plundered the nation's wealth for their own material gain. Not only had the regime neglected their basic civic, economic and Islamic duties but when the concerned citizens, scholars and *ulema* pointed out their transgressions and suggested an alternative course of action, their protestations were ignored and the authors and supporters were persecuted for speaking out. The culmination of these failures, and the active harm and humiliation being inflicted on the people due to the presence of American troops had forced the Islamists into using violence to correct these wrongs.

Aside from an instruction to boycott Western goods the *fatwa* is less clear on the more nefarious methods that should be used. In several places the *jihadists'* bombings and other violent activities are praised and it is clear that bin Laden thinks that these are the most

⁹⁴ The translation of the *fatwa* has been published by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html

⁹⁵ Bernard Lewis *The Crisis Of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* pp.125-126

efficient and effective tools available to the movement. Following the tradition of Ibn Taymiyya and Abdullah Azzam he states that Islam is under attack, the most conspicuous example being the presence of *infidels* in the Arabian Peninsula. Restating Azzam's dictum he states that the most important duty after belief, incumbent on individual Muslims, is to expel the Americans from the Land of the Two Holy Places. The only way that this can be done, as there is an imbalance of power, is to use 'guerrilla warfare ... with complete secrecy ... [and avoid engaging] in conventional fighting.'

Although the burden of *jihad* falls on all the *umma* bin Laden makes a direct appeal to the new generation of Muslim youths. This is in line with the themes that run through the *fatwa* that claimed the impending *jihad* both necessitated, and simultaneously precipitated, a religious and political awakening of the *umma*. As al-Banna and Qutb had previously argued, bin Laden believed that Muslims needed a jolt to their collective consciousness to realise the perilous existential situation of Islam in the modern world, and the irreconcilable conflict it is embroiled in with the forces of *jahiliyya*, that define the condition and essential unity of the global *umma*.⁹⁶ Al-Banna had created a mass-movement to achieve this awakening, Qutb had imagined a dedicated and pure Islamist vanguard, Zawahiri hoped to topple the Egyptian government to create an Islamist state; for bin Laden hope lay in the new generation of Muslim youths committed to the Islamist project and willing to sacrifice their lives, in violent terrorist actions, to achieve its ends. Thus, the central significance of the *fatwa* and probably bin Laden's most infamous message, directed at William Perry the then U.S. Defense Secretary, and also the American public: 'These [Muslim] youths love death as you loves [sic] life.'

In contrast with the clarity of purpose for dealing with the Americans bin Laden's attitude towards the Saudi and other Muslim regimes the language and arguments used are more ambiguous. He stops short of pronouncing the Saudis *takfir*—essentially bin Laden remains conservative when faced with the prospect of revolt although he does obliquely suggest that the failure to implement *shar'ia* 'would strip a person [of] his Islamic status.' Despite castigating the regime he does not openly incite revolution. Although this is a function of bin Laden's pragmatism—he does not believe in the utility of fighting several enemies at once and his patronage in Afghanistan depended on Saudi acquiescence—it is also a result of his

⁹⁶ Bernard Lewis *The Crisis Of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* p.124

ideological conservatism. Recreating the imagined unity of the global *umma* is of more importance than the disutility caused by corrupt Muslim governments. In this regard bin Laden couches a Qutbian historical perspective within the familiar register of the modern Islamist's conspiratorial worldview. Thus the *fatwa* claims that the *umma* have been tricked, manipulated and coerced by the forces of *jahiliyya* (now variously relabelled as the 'Zionist-crusader alliance;' 'American-Israeli;' 'Christians army') into internecine fighting that has prevented them from recognising the crucial mission of 'unification ... under the divine law of Allah.' Although bin Laden poses the discrete challenge of expelling American troops from Saudi Arabia and introducing Islamist reform, the much more grandiose goal is to effect a change of shared consciousness in all Muslims, and even non-Muslims, of uncovering the ultimate conflict between Islam and the West.⁹⁷ The method that he dedicates the following five years to achieving this awakening is to create a spark that will bring the war into the open by provoking the symbol and superpower of the West into openly attacking Islam.⁹⁸ Before this could happen bin Laden would need to rebuild al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and reunite with his old friend, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

4.4.11 Gama'a al-Islamiyya Cease-Fire Initiative

It is interesting that one of the events that led up to the allying of Zawahiri's EIJ organization with al-Qaeda, occurred in Egypt, where EIJ had effectively ceased operational activities since Zawahiri's move to Afghanistan. Zawahiri had left Egypt frustrated with the failure of the alliance between EIJ and *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* with other, smaller Islamist groups, to overthrow the Egyptian government in a *coup d'état*. As we have previously seen this failure—that expressed itself most clearly in the conspicuous absence of a revolutionary uprising following Sadat's assassination—resulted in an extensive crackdown on the Egyptian Islamists and the breakup of the coalition. After serving a three year prison sentence Zawahiri decided to leave the country to continue the *jihad* in Afghanistan. Many members of EIJ, however, remained in Egypt and *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* continued a campaign of terrorist violence but this time they targeted softer targets including Egyptian Copts, police

⁹⁷ Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* pp.165-166

⁹⁸ At approximately the same time as writing the 1996 *fatwa* bin Laden met Khalid Sheik Mohammed the uncle of Ramzi Yousef—the man who planned the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. At the meeting Khalid Sheik Mohammed suggested a bombastic plot to simultaneously explode twelve American aeroplanes over the Pacific. Although this plan never came into fruition it seems likely that the beginning of the idea of 9/11 began to ferment in both men's minds at this point, and it also may have inspired some of the ideas present in the *fatwa*. The 9/11 Commission Report pp.148-149

and in particular foreign tourists, in the hope of undermining the power of the government by destroying a crucial segment of the economy. Although they did not succeed in inflicting sufficient damage on the government they certainly managed to wreak havoc on the tourist industry through sporadic attacks on targets including Nile cruise ships in the early 1990s.

The failure to achieve their primary target of destabilising the government, and with most of their leadership, including the spiritual leader of the group the blind cleric Omar Abdel-Rahman, imprisoned or actively persecuted by the state, resulted in the demoralization of its members. Their choice of target in the tourist industry only resulted in a huge public backlash especially from the vast numbers of the urban poor who had barely managed to eke out a livelihood on the edges of the tourism economy. Cruise ships were banned from sailing between Cairo and Luxor, a measure that remains in effect at the time of writing, and tourists were forced to travel in police-escorted convoys between the major cities and were forbidden from visiting others. Having isolated their natural constituents, generated widespread public resentment and with the membership in disarray, the imprisoned leaders were effectively forced into negotiating a ceasefire agreement with the government. In 1996 Kahled Ibrahim, the leader of *Gama'a al-Islamiyya*, called for the cessation of armed operations for a year.⁹⁹

The sudden reversal of tactics, combined with the decentralized organisational structure and outside interference from Zawahiri, meant that not all members could be brought into line with the leader's initiative and just a few months later the bloodiest attack in Egypt's modern history was executed in Luxor.¹⁰⁰ Early in the morning on the November 17th, 1997 several gunmen belonging to *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* entered the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut and over the course of an hour killed fifty-nine foreigners and four Egyptians. It is likely that the attack was intended to derail the cease-fire agreement but instead it reinforced the trends that had made the initiative a necessity for the group. It also brought into stark contrast the split that was occurring in the Islamist movement between those who subscribed to the Islamic legitimacy and efficacy of terrorist violence as a tactic and those who renounced it in favour of political dialogue.¹⁰¹ The backlash caused by this attack was not, therefore, restricted to the response of the government and the public; it also evoked an angry response from the leadership of *Gama'a al-Islamiyya*. Montasser al-Zayyat, the group's lawyer and

⁹⁹ Montasser al-Zayyat *The Road To al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right Hand Man* p.70

¹⁰⁰ Zawahiri was later implicated in the planning of the attack.

¹⁰¹ Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* pp.115-116

spokesperson, describes how Zawahiri's close relationship with bin Laden had changed him, reporting that upon returning to Afghanistan from Sudan Zawahiri 'had become completely different from the man we once knew.'¹⁰² Instead of being committed to the overthrow of the Egyptian state, Zayyat accused Zawahiri of turning EIJ into a mere tool for al-Qaeda. The *Gama'a al-Islamiyya's* cease-fire initiative, Zawahiri's response, and Zayyat's critique, demonstrated once again the dramatic and recurring polarization of the Islamist movement into groups who renounce violence and wish to engage in the mainstream political discourse and those who entirely reject any form of ideological compromise.

Following the Luxor massacre it became clear that Zawahiri and the EIJ had failed to bring the *Gama'a al-Islamiyya's* leadership around to his way of thinking. It was also clear that Zawahiri's scope for acting within Egypt had narrowed. Since his move to Afghanistan the EIJ had effectively ceased operation in Egypt as Zawahiri's focus had moved to the 'external enemy' who he reasoned were in fact the real power behind the Egyptian government. Now that the Soviets had been defeated this increasingly meant the United States. Nevertheless, Zawahiri, like Azzam, was keen to eliminate what he thought of the false dichotomy of the 'internal' and 'external' enemy and his overall aim remained the overthrow of the Egyptian government and its replacement with an Islamist regime. Now that Zawahiri and the EIJ had become isolated in Egypt he was forced into reformulating his ideology, bringing it into line with his associate bin Laden and al-Qaeda group. This also entailed an organizational change that had become necessary because of EIJ's inability to operate within Egypt. Zawahiri and his followers were effectively caught in a pincer movement that is characteristic of the history of the Islamist movement. The renouncement of violence by one section of the movement or group causes the other half to reinvent its identity and reassert its power by avowing to follow an even more radical and violent path. It is the schism that creates the new outbreak of violent energy, normally in the smaller and politically isolated group, as it is put in a position where it needs to fight for its ideological existence and tries to retain its marginal followers, sponsors, membership and constituents. In February 1998 these ideological and organizational upheavals were formalized in the creation of bin Laden's Global Front for Fighting Jews and Crusaders and the merging of the remnants of EIJ with al-Qaeda.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Montasser al-Zayyat *The Road To al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right Hand Man* p.95

¹⁰³ The 9/11 Commission Report p.65

4.4.12 1998 Fatwa

The second of bin Laden's *fatwas* was printed in the same month as the formation of the Global Front and so served as a *de facto* manifesto for the group.¹⁰⁴ It continues with most of the major themes of the 1996 *fatwa* but in a more concentrated and circumscribed form. The opening sentence pays tribute to Allah as one who 'defeats factionalism' emphasising the importance that bin Laden attaches to the unity of the *umma* as well as celebrating his reunion with Zawahiri. The *fatwa* is largely a rehash of the 1996 document, using the same language but this time concentrating on the particular crises of the American presence in the 'Arabian Peninsula ... [occupied by] the crusader armies ... eating its riches' as well as the more general complaint that this is taking place 'at a time in which nations are attacking Muslims.'

One accusation new to the 1998 *fatwa* is the claim that America is using the Peninsula as a 'staging post ... [to commit] continuing aggression against the Iraqi people.' The major difference between the two, however, is what is missing rather than what is added. In stark contrast with the earlier *fatwa* no mention is made of the Saudi regime's complicity with the U.S. presence on its land nor are any other Muslim governments criticised. Presumably when drafting the document bin Laden, by holding the balance-of-power, managed to convince Zawahiri to redirect his *jihadi* ambitions away from his long held objective of toppling the Egyptian government, and concentrate instead on the least controversial or divisive, external enemies: America and Israel. The necessity of recreating the unity of the global *umma* and uniting them against a singular enemy, in a single cause has, in this document, silenced the virulent rhetoric that bin Laden had directed against the Saudi establishment over the previous six years.¹⁰⁵ The actual imperative of the *fatwa*—justified by the American occupation and aggression committed against Muslims in Iraq and across the globe—is 'the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible.' Six months later al-Qaeda would put these words into devastating action.

¹⁰⁴ The translation of the *fatwa* has been published by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1998.html

¹⁰⁵ Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* p.165

4.4.13 Two Tactical Strands: Propaganda of the Deed and the Videotape

In the two years between his return to Afghanistan and the release of his 1996 *fatwa*; and his reunion with Zawahiri and the publication of the 1998 *fatwa*, bin Laden had been carefully consolidating his position in Afghanistan. The parochialism and provincialism of the Taliban contrasted sharply with the globalised ideology of Zawahiri and bin Laden. Despite their ideological incongruities Mullar Omar, after several meetings with bin Laden, formed a tentative friendship—initially defined and circumscribed by political considerations—and invited his family to move to a compound near Kandahar. Here the Taliban had formed the seat of their government in the spiritual capital of Afghanistan they could keep a careful watch on their guests and, at least attempt to, regulate their media campaign against the Taliban's main sponsors, Saudi Arabia. The relationship between Omar and bin Laden continued to improve at the same time as the Taliban consolidated power and thus decreased their dependency on their Saudi and Pakistani sponsors. Proof of the shift in Omar's loyalties came in September 1998 just after the embassy bombings in Africa, when he politely, but firmly refused a direct request by Prince Turki and General Naseem Rana, the head of the ISI, to hand over bin Laden.¹⁰⁶

At the same time as bin Laden was consolidating his position with the Taliban he also undertook the restructuring of al-Qaeda. The model that had prevailed in Sudan of a business empire with a philanthropic interest in sponsoring and aiding Islamist activities evolved into an exclusive focus on bin Laden's *jihadist* ambitions. Although now entirely committed to fulfilling the pledges of the 1996 *fatwa* bin Laden was aware of the limitations of his group, especially now that his main sources of income had been cut. With limited funds and a small number of al-Qaeda members it was decided that greater use would have to be made of a previously established tactic: the harnessing of technologies and utilization of destructive techniques that resulted in disproportionate benefit-to-cost ratio. Bin Laden struck on two main ways of following this model, through the use of modern propaganda techniques—where the majority of the cost was borne by the broadcaster—and the designing and sponsorship of spectacular and symbolically-oriented terrorist attacks. These two stands were united by three elements: both supported the narrative that was described in the 1996 *fatwa*,

¹⁰⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report pp.121-122

they utilised a shared and powerful symbolic language, and they were cheap to execute and effective in their outcomes.

4.4.14 Propaganda Campaign

The propaganda strand was an evolution of the volley of faxes that had been sent to London prior to al-Qaeda's expulsion from Sudan. Shortly after arriving in Afghanistan bin Laden sought out a more targeted and effective method of communicating the ideology that had been disseminated in the 1996 *fatwa*. A carefully orchestrated media campaign was devised whereby foreign journalists from both the Western and Muslim world were invited to interview the leader.¹⁰⁷ At this point bin Laden was an obscure figure, especially to a Western audience, but his *fatwa* was a virtual declaration of war on America and this piqued journalistic interest enough to ensure that some were prepared to make the journey with a camera crew. The interviews were carefully framed by bin Laden's team and they paid particular attention to the visual imagery. The first interviews took place in Jalalabad where the symbolism of the stark aesthetic of the caves conveyed the sacrifices and dedication of bin Laden who could otherwise have been living an easy life in Saudi Arabia. Later on, after the relocation to Kandahar, the less subtle but more arresting technique of introducing bin Laden with a burst of automatic gunfire was used to convey the violent intent behind his message. Interestingly the first interview was with CNN—in the cave—whilst the latter was with a Pakistani news organisation suggesting that the message was being tailored towards its audience. In the first instance the narrative presented was of a pure, authentic Islam struggling against the destructive, all-consuming march of modernity; whilst in the latter the strength and bloody intent of the *jihadists* was the key message aimed at its Muslim audience.¹⁰⁸

4.4.15 Violent Campaign

The propaganda campaign was successful on both of the criteria set by bin Laden. It was cheap to implement as most of the costs of filming and distributing the footage was paid for

¹⁰⁷ Osama bin Laden "March 1997 CNN Interview" cited in Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* p.164

¹⁰⁸ Ben Venzke and Aimee Ibrahim eds. *The Al-Qaeda Threat: An Analytical Guide to al-Qaeda's Tactics and Targets* p.139

by the networks, and it was effective in attracting donations and new recruits of young men who once again began to arrive in Peshawar and transported across the border for inculcation and training in the reopened al-Qaeda camps and guest houses. The strategy was also effective in facilitating the second strand of al-Qaeda's campaign: the utilisation of spectacular violent attacks against symbolic U.S. targets. By attracting publicity bin Laden was showing that al-Qaeda, after a period of relative inaction, was once again open for business. As well as receiving a fresh round of recruits, more experienced *jihadists* began to approach al-Qaeda with proposals for Islamist operations. These would be considered by an al-Qaeda committee and then either accepted, rejected or amended—a model that one commentator likened to a research grant committee.¹⁰⁹ If successful a small amount of seed money would be provided to facilitate the plan as well as any logistical or personnel aid that was required.¹¹⁰ The outcome of one of these applications resulted in the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa. The two strands effectively worked in tandem, the propaganda facilitated the terrorist operations and the spectacle of the violence served as powerful propaganda, creating a positive feedback loop.¹¹¹

The way we interpret terrorist violence is important for how we understand bin Laden's ideology and the attacks on the U.S. embassies and 9/11. There are two broad competing theories. The first, advocated by social scientist Olivier Roy, is that al-Qaeda understands themselves as operating on a transcendent plane whereby they are embroiled in a grand conflict between the forces of belief and unbelief.¹¹² According to this view there is no point in trying to negotiate with bin Laden as political compromises and promises hold no value to him; they simply do not impinge on his worldview. Al-Qaeda operatives act for 'the sake and pleasure of Allah, ... for the sake of self-achievement (in death), for escaping a corrupt world ... [and with a] strange mix of deep personal pessimism and collective millenarianist optimism.'¹¹³ From this perspective to kill Americans and other Westerners is an end-in-itself and only a means towards the utopian—and impossible—goal of winning the ultimate battle of Islam against *jahiliyya* by eliminating the latter. These would-be martyrs therefore have 'no compunction about employing chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons

¹⁰⁹ Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* pp.232-233

¹¹⁰ Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* p.127

¹¹¹ Jason Burke *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* p.182

¹¹² Olivier Roy *The Failure of Political Islam* pp.96-99

¹¹³ Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* p.57

against population centers.¹¹⁴ The second camp, by contrast, claim that far from being nihilist madmen, al-Qaeda, as an organization are rational actors who utilize terrorism as the most effective means of achieving their ends.¹¹⁵

Neither of these interpretations of al-Qaeda's terrorist violence is entirely satisfactory. As we have suggested earlier bin Laden seeks to mould the everyday politics of the world in which he operates into a transcendent framework, but this does not mean that he is fundamentally opposed or oblivious to political opportunities and constraints. As we shall see both the embassy bombings and 9/11 can be reasonably interpreted as provocations for America to openly attack a Muslim country; to this extent both the attacks can be understood within the instrumental framework. Accepting this is correct we must pose the additional question of why he wanted to target the U.S. One answer that we have previously entertained follows the instrumental logic: bin Laden believed that the U.S., like the Soviets, were 'paper tigers' who could be defeated on the battlefield using the same asymmetric, guerrilla warfare techniques that had, according to the *jihadists'* mythology, destroyed the Soviet Union. Once militarily exhausted the economic, political and social structures would quickly collapse, forcing America to withdraw its support for Israel and corrupt Muslim regimes. The second answer, utilising the transcendent framework, is that by compelling America to respond to a provocation by openly attacking Muslims the real nature of the existential battle of Islam versus *jahiliyya* would be unveiled to the world. In Zawahiri's words '[the Americans will] personally wage the battle against the Muslims, which means that the battle will turn into clear-cut jihad against infidels.'¹¹⁶

Only by utilizing interpretive understanding and taking ideology seriously can the instrumental and value rationality of Islamist terrorist actions be reconciled and understood. This allows us to claim that the answer to this dispute resides in a mixture of the two modes of interpretation; that the violence should be understood both within an instrumental and value-rational framework. The modern Islamist ideology contained and to some extent ameliorated the contradictions of al-Banna's strategic pragmatism and Qutb's transcendent value-rational utopianism. Both elements of the ideology are present in the texts and statements of the globalised *jihadists* and there is no reason why one view should be given

¹¹⁴ Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* p.15

¹¹⁵ As we saw in the first chapter Robert Pape is a prominent advocate of the rational-choice model of terrorism.

¹¹⁶ Ayman al-Zawahiri *Knights Under The Prophet's Banner*

priority over the other. David Charters calls this ambiguity at the heart of al-Qaeda ‘Janus faced’ explaining that ‘it espouses long-term goals that reflect its radical ideology, while in the short-term it behaves as a *realpolitik*-guided rational actor.’¹¹⁷ The flexibility in bin Laden’s ideology explains the longevity of the movement and the ability of the globalised Islamist ideology to adapt easily to new political situations.

4.4.16 U.S. Embassy Bombings

Apart from the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, that could only be weakly linked to bin Laden’s original training camps in Afghanistan, the first major manifestation of this new ideological imperative and organizational alliance, came on August 7th, 1998. Within just a few minutes of each other two massive truck bombs exploded outside the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam killing in total approximately 223 people and wounding several thousand.¹¹⁸ The majority of the casualties were locals who either worked in the embassies or just happened to be nearby; however 12 Americans were also killed. In a statement released three days before the attack Zawahiri claims that the bombings were in revenge for the arrest and extradition of three EIJ members. He wrote ‘The Americans should read [the message] carefully because we will write it, God willing, in the language they understand.’¹¹⁹ The moral equivalence that Zawahiri draws between his own group’s terrorist violence and the violence committed by the United States as a shared ‘language’ is important. In order to justify bombings in which many of the casualties were not the direct target (and many of whom will also be Muslims), Zawahiri and bin Laden claim that they are merely borrowing the tactics of their enemy. Furthermore they claim that due to their relative weakness they can only engage in violence using irregular tactics.

Although the proximate justification of the embassy bombings was the extradition—with the aid of the CIA—of three EIJ activists from Albania to Egypt, the underlying explanation for the attack lies deeper. The embassy bombings marked an important change in the tactics employed by the Islamists under the aegis of al-Qaeda, although it is crucial to recognise that this was once again, an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, development. In common with the Luxor massacre, the attackers selected soft targets, tourists and embassies, rather

¹¹⁷ David A. Charters “Something Old, Something New...? Al Qaeda, Jihadism, and Fascism”

¹¹⁸ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* p.320

¹¹⁹ Montasser al-Zayyat *The Road To al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden’s Right Hand Man* p.72

than military targets. This represented a continuation of the trend starting with the Egyptian embassy bombing in 1995, in line with Zawahiri's doctrine of selecting targets based on the material and technological capability of the group and employing methods, such as the suicide bomber, that resulted in the fewest number of casualties for the Islamists and was least likely to fail. The use of suicide attacks, where the perpetrator either dies directly as a result of the action, or is not expected to survive, has symbolic significance, both in the theological symbol of the martyr and as a material demonstration of the ideology's transcendent belief in glory in death over shame in life.

Despite the continuities the embassy bombings also marked an important shift in the *modus operandi* of al-Qaeda operations. All previous attacks had taken place in countries where the Islamists' perceived that a Muslim land had been occupied by an *infidel* army—including Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia, Chechnya and Saudi Arabia.¹²⁰ The U.S. embassy bombings therefore represent a shift away from the defensive, territorially-confined, idea of *jihād* espoused by Azzam towards the offensive, unlimited ideology that had been jointly imagined by Qutb, bin Laden and Zawahiri.¹²¹ They also demonstrate the fulfilment of the second strand of al-Qaeda's operational tactics outlined in 1996—terrorism as propaganda. The U.S. embassy bombings also differed from previous attacks in their scale and spectacle. The use of huge truck bombs, simultaneously detonated was guaranteed to achieve a visually spectacular result in the decimated remains of the buildings. This demonstrated the power of the group and their technical and organizational ability to achieve near simultaneous attacks over a great distance. The spectacle of terrorism—and the harrowing spectre of future attacks—were not lost on bin Laden. Zawahiri explicitly stated in the communiqué before the bombings that they were intended as a message to the Americans in a 'language' they can understand. It seems very likely that they also understood that the message had more than one recipient. Not only was the American government to receive the message but so too were the American public, and by extension other Western citizens, but so too were fellow Muslims and Islamists.

4.5 The Path to 9/11

¹²⁰ Marc Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks* pp.47-48

¹²¹ Rohan Gunaratna *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* p.313

It is beyond the scope of this work to study the detailed history of the attacks on September 11th, 2001. Instead it is important to interpret the significance, justification and meaning of 9/11 within the paradigm of the globalized Islamist ideology. Although the nexus of events that constitute 9/11 can be interpreted in several ways and framed within different narratives we shall utilize the ideological prism through which Osama bin Laden and the international Islamists understood the operation. Furthermore, although 9/11 is unquestionably the most important single act executed by Islamists we must not make the mistake of analysing it out of context. In the run up to 9/11 al-Qaeda continued to operate according to its methodology established from its expulsion from Sudan, pursuing the twin complementary objectives of propaganda and acts of symbolic violence, which together were intended to achieve the ultimate objective of an unveiling to the world of the grand Qutbian conflict that informed the worldview and actions of bin Laden and his fellow Islamists. Within this context the events of 9/11 can be viewed as the pinnacle of the process that began with the embassy bombings, passed through the unsuccessful millennial attacks on Los Angeles International airport and USS *The Sullivans* and the partially successful USS *Cole* operation, and culminated in 9/11.

For bin Laden the anticipated response to al-Qaeda operations were as important as the actual act. Within a Hegelian framework the synthesis or final outcome of an operation was a product of the operation—the thesis—and the response—the antithesis. The eventual synthesis that bin Laden imagined was something like the transcendental battle of Islam and *jahiliyya* that fired Qutb's imagination. Bin Laden however, unlike Qutb, was also a pragmatist and realist, and so was aware this grand conflict would not reveal itself to the rest of the world if left to its own devices. A further difference to Qutb was that bin Laden, as a former pupil of Azzam, was attuned to the ethical power that a narrative of 'Islam under attack' had with Muslims who were uncomfortable with militancy and violence. He therefore had the paradoxical mission of realising Qutb's vision but reorienting the conflict so that Islam would appear imperilled by the West and yet somehow achieve this through offensive means. Bin Laden wanted to show that Islam was under attack—thereby justifying a defensive *jihad*—but could only do this by first attacking the West. From this perspective we can appreciate the importance of the propaganda strand to al-Qaeda and how vital it was that the response to their provocations was robust enough to give force to the narrative of a defensive *jihad* in the face of Western aggression.

There is a strong possibility that the embassy bombings were intended to provoke America into invading Afghanistan. In any case the American response, Operation Infinite Reach, was to fire several cruise missiles at suspected training camps in Afghanistan and at a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan.¹²² Aside from the failure of the missiles to kill any senior al-Qaeda operatives the retaliation was also a propaganda success because it propelled bin Laden's status as a heroic figure of resistance against the long reach of the American military. Bin Laden capitalised on the propaganda value by boasting in an audio broadcast: 'by the grace of God, I am alive.'¹²³ This was shortly followed by Zawahiri's taunt:

Tell the Americans that we aren't afraid of bombardment, threats, and acts of aggression. We suffered and survived the Soviet bombings for ten years in Afghanistan The war has just begun; the Americans should now await the answer.¹²⁴

4.5.1 Millennium Plots

In the run up to the millennium anticipation of a spectacular terrorist attack was high. The unspecified threat of an unknown terrorist attack including speculation about the use of non-conventional weapons segued with the general hysteria over the Y2K bug created a febrile atmosphere that al-Qaeda were keen to exploit.¹²⁵ The changing methods of al-Qaeda had begun several years earlier with the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 masterminded by Khalid Sheik Mohammed's nephew Ramzi Yousef. Yousef had passed through one of the original al-Qaeda camps during the Afghan *jihad* where he received ordnance and explosives training.¹²⁶ He was one of an estimated ten to twenty-thousand trainees that passed through the camps where they received ideological indoctrination, physical conditioning and firearms instruction.¹²⁷ The vast majority left the camps without being formally recruited by al-Qaeda, thus allowing it to remain an elite and highly centralized organization and provided an effective barrier to infiltration by intelligence agencies. As with many others Yousef was not recruited, but unlike the majority he went on to become a successful, freelance terrorist. He travelled to the U.S., recruited a cell in New York and after receiving a *fatwa* from Sheik

¹²² John Davis "Implications of Preventive Wars for Collective Security"

¹²³ Osama bin Laden cited in Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.285

¹²⁴ Ayman al-Zawahiri cited in Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.286

¹²⁵ Also known as the Year 2000 problem, it concerned the expected problems when the abbreviated year in computer code changed from 99 to 00.

¹²⁶ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.177

¹²⁷ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* pp.301-302

Omar Abdel Rahman (the spiritual leader of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*) he devised, funded and executed a truck bombing of the World Trade Center that killed six and injured over a thousand people. Al-Qaeda as an organization and funding body was barely needed in this instance. Their main contribution was the training that Yousef had received but more importantly the ideology that was fostered and disseminated in the Afghan camps. The operationally and financially autonomous—but ideologically inspired—form of terrorist attack, pioneered by Yousef, would later evolve into the phenomenon known as self-starter terrorism.

The first failed millennial operation was planned and unsuccessfully executed by Ahmed Ressay. Ressay, in many respects was an incompetent, or at least unlucky, version of Yousef. An Algerian asylum-seeker in Canada, and a petty criminal, Ressay attended an al-Qaeda training camp in 1998 where he received the standard training programme in light arms and explosives.¹²⁸ After returning to Canada he single-handedly assembled a large fertilizer bomb with the intention of bombing Los Angeles International Airport timed to coincide with the new millennium. The plot was disrupted when an alert border official stopped the nervous-looking Ressay when he disembarked from a car ferry and the detonation timers were discovered in the car boot. It later transpired that he had attempted to contact al-Qaeda leaders before the attempted attack to see if they would care to take the credit for the operation—an offer that was ignored by bin Laden.¹²⁹ The incident pointed the way in which not only al-Qaeda as a form of the Islamist ideology would inspire self-starter *jihadists* across the world but also the way in which the 'brand' of al-Qaeda could be utilized as a propaganda and marketing tool.

4.5.2 USS The Sullivans and USS Cole

The first millennial operation directly planned by al-Qaeda was the failed attack on USS *The Sullivans* on January 3rd, 2000. The skiff that was to bomb the guided missile destroyer in Aden harbour sank under the weight of the explosives. Although bin Laden had wanted to abandon the plot after this inauspicious failure the leader of the cell, the Yemeni Tewfiq bin Attash (who later changed his name to Khallad) insisted on repeating the attempt when an opportunity next presented itself. Illustrating the interactive dynamic between the leaders and

¹²⁸ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.262

¹²⁹ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* pp.297-298

the operatives, bin Laden bowed to Khallad's superior local knowledge and ten months later on October 12th the mission was reattempted. This time it was a success blowing a hole in the side of the USS *Cole*, killing seventeen sailors and injuring thirty-nine. The stunning asymmetry of the attack made the bombing, despite the failure to sink the warship, propaganda success. The multi-billion dollar destroyer clad in heavy armour shielding and angular panels designed to absorb radar waves thus making the ship "invisible" was hopelessly vulnerable to a small fibreglass skiff packed with shaped charges.

The two Islamists piloting the skiff reportedly waved at lookouts aboard the USS *Cole* before exploding their boat in a mocking gesture of the rules of engagement that prevented the navy from opening fire as they approached. The juxtaposition of the huge, high-tech, expensive, militarised, menacing and superficially mighty product of Western modernity with the small, simple but devastating skiff was a perfect metaphor for al-Qaeda to exploit.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the purity and dedication of the two Islamist martyrs dedicated to sacrificing their lives for their cause contrasted with the professional sailors who hoped to preserve theirs. Osama bin Laden later commented: 'the destroyer represented the capital of the West, and the small boat represented Mohammed.'¹³¹ The final measure of success was the cost-benefit analysis that had always concerned bin Laden. For the USS *Cole* mission the billion dollar warship was severely damaged and disabled for an outlay that ran into several thousand dollars and so represented an impressive return on the investment. The same type of economic analysis was also considered when the 9/11 plot was being devised.

As with the embassy bombings bin Laden probably intended to provoke the U.S. into retaliating with a disproportionate response and he certainly planned for a volley of guided missiles. He sent his most important deputies, Mohammed Atef, Khalid Sheik Mohammed and Ayman al-Zawahiri into three separate locations so they could not all be killed in the same strike.¹³² The anticipated reaction did not materialize but bin Laden still sought to extract the maximum propaganda value from the mission. In the following months a multi-format media campaign, headed by Khalid Sheik Mohammed, was launched that linked together images of the suffering of Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and other territories with a vitriolic re-enactment of the *Cole* bombing. The success of the operation

¹³⁰ An operative was sent to film the attack for propaganda purposes but overslept and so missed the explosion.

¹³¹ Osama bin Laden cited in Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.319

¹³² The 9/11 Commission Report p.191

was demonstrated with a fresh wave of willing volunteers arriving in Peshawar and then travelling to the Afghan training camps with the hope of participating in the globalised *jihad* of bin Laden's imagination. Much needed new funds also flowed in from wealthy supporters in the Gulf states.¹³³

The absence of a retaliation may have simultaneously irked and pleased bin Laden. It demonstrated the lack of resolve behind the massive U.S. military machine and indicated political impotence at the head of the superpower—this supported the 'paper tiger' model that had gained traction in the Islamists' worldview in the wake of the Afghan *jihad*. New funds and recruits, however—as welcome as they were—fell far short of the almost apocalyptic encounter between Islam and *jahiliyya* that filled bin Laden's imagination. For this to occur an overwhelming transgression would have to be committed that the West would find impossible to ignore.¹³⁴ Although it is unlikely that it had been a conscious grand plan, the pattern of the al-Qaeda attacks followed an interesting schema. The embassy bombings were an attack on U.S. politics, specifically foreign policy, the USS *Cole* was directed at the U.S. military, and finally the 9/11 bombings would culminate in a strike at the iconic symbols of U.S. political, legislature, economic and military systems in a single, overwhelming blow.¹³⁵

4.5.3 9/11

The planning of 9/11 was organised in a similar way to the USS *Cole* attack. The targets and broad structure of the mission was decided by bin Laden, Khalid Sheik Mohammed (henceforth KSM) and Mohammed Atef, but the operatives used the knowledge that they gleaned locally to finesse the operational details of the plot. The original proposal had been developed by KSM and his nephew Ramzi Yousef, and a version was presented to bin Laden in 1996. The outlandish 'bojinka' mission envisaged the hijacking of 12 transatlantic aeroplanes the first 11 of which would be exploded in midair; the last, piloted by KSM would be landed in an Arab country where he would kill all of the male passengers and deliver an

¹³³ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.331

¹³⁴ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.331

¹³⁵ The symbolic political and legislature target was to be the United States Capitol building: the intended target of Flight 93. Bin Laden wished to crash the fourth aeroplane into the White House but Mohammed Atta and Khalid Sheik Mohammed decided that this would be too difficult to achieve.

Islamist diatribe to the waiting global media.¹³⁶ Bin Laden had dismissed the plot in 1996 as he had just arrived in Afghanistan and thought that the mission would be impossible to bring to successful fruition. KSM approached bin Laden again in late 1999 with a scaled-down version of the plot that planned to hijack several flights and crash them into multiple symbolic buildings on the east and west coast of the U.S. One of the targets selected was the World Trade Center, at least in part because KSM wished to achieve their destruction that had eluded his nephew.

Osama bin Laden, in consultation with KSM and Mohammed Atef, further refined the scope of the mission to include only high-value targets on the east coast although there is some evidence that a second wave of strikes was planned for the west with targets including the Sears tower in Chicago.¹³⁷ The first operatives personally selected by bin Laden and Atef for the mission were all long-serving and trusted members of al-Qaeda. They included two Saudi nationals Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Midhar; and two Yemenis one of whom was Khallad, the mastermind behind the USS *Cole* mission. The original plan called for these four to be the pilots that would crash hijacked aeroplanes into their targets. The mission, however, soon ran into difficulty when the two Yemenis were denied visas despite their numerous applications. The Saudis who found it easier to enter into the U.S. also faced a daunting task as they spoke poor English and were ill-equipped and socially isolated for their initial job of enrolling in flight schools. Even the simplest tasks such as renting out an apartment proved difficult due to the language barrier and their unfamiliarity with U.S. norms. It soon became clear that new recruits would need to be found who were better able to integrate with the society they wished to attack.

Fortuitously for bin Laden at about this time four young men who had been studying in Germany arrived at the Khaldan training camp.¹³⁸ Mohammed Atta, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, Marwan al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah were typical of the second wave of *jihadi* volunteers that had been arriving since al-Qaeda had relocated to Afghanistan in 1996. The first wave were primarily composed of men from the Gulf States, Egypt and Algeria, often with an Islamist past in their own country, and were seeking a way out of persecution at home. The second

¹³⁶ Further details of the plot included assassinating Pope John Paul II and crashing an aeroplane into the CIA headquarters.

¹³⁷ The 9/11 Commission Report p.149

¹³⁸ Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.301

wave by contrast was more likely to be young, single men who were first-generation emigrants, often to a Western state. What they had in common was a sense of isolation and identity crises where they were unable to fully identify with either their homeland or that of their new society. Their lives were marked by feelings of displacement, marginality, exile and alienation which were exacerbated by their illegal or temporary right to residency. Neither authentically British nor Pakistani, to use one example, it was common for these men to search out a new, pristine identity that could be found in their local mosque.¹³⁹ Many gravitated to the Wahhabi-sponsored mosques that offered the simple purity of the Islamic identity that they sought.¹⁴⁰ From here they were sometimes directed towards the Islamist ideology with its coherent, comprehensive, comforting and compelling worldview through which they could make sense of their lives and the world, especially since the ideology cast the dispersed global *umma* as the victims of a grand conflict with the West.¹⁴¹

Despite their alienation many of these first and second generation immigrants were superficially integrated into their host society to the extent that they were familiar with Western norms and spoke their host nation's language and often English as well. This was the case with the Egyptian Mohammed Atta and his friends who had were all studying at university and had met at the Wahhabi al-Quds mosque. In November 1999 they travelled together to Pakistan and then to Afghanistan.¹⁴² In the training camp they were spotted for their urbanity, English language skills and their ability to live unobtrusively in the West. Bin Laden personally selected the group and told them about the 'planes operation.' Their commitment to martyrdom having been established the second cell of the plot was formed. They were to fly back to Germany and then on to America where they would enrol in flight training schools. Upon their return they all applied for replacement passports, claiming theirs had been lost, presumably to cover the tracks of having visited Pakistan for several weeks. Three of the four successfully applied for US visas, but the Yemeni al-Shihb was rejected on several applications.¹⁴³ These three, together with a Saudi, Hani Hanjour, would be the pilots for the operation. Ramzi bin al-Shihb stayed in Germany and played an important role coordinating between KSM and Atta as well as wiring funds to the operatives.

¹³⁹ Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* p.45

¹⁴⁰ Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* p.318

¹⁴¹ Olivier Roy *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* p.18

¹⁴² Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.307

¹⁴³ The 9/11 Commission Report p.225

At the end of May, 2001 all four pilots, along with a suspected fifth pilot, Zacarias Moussaouri, had arrived in America and were busy enrolling in flight training schools and practicing on computer simulators. Mohammed Atta, as the lead operative took a number of scouting flights where he observed cabin procedure, taking note of when access to the cockpit could be gained, as well as testing what could get through airport security and then used as an improvised weapon. He also compiled timetables of flights to work out the optimal routes that could be simultaneously crashed into the selected targets. One result of his research was the decision that the US Capitol presented a more realistic target than the White House and thus changed the target list despite bin Laden's preference for the latter, more iconic building.

With the mission finalised the hijackers waited for the approval of the final date—selected by Atta—from bin Laden and then purchased first class tickets for the four flights between the end of August and first week of September.¹⁴⁴ The total cost of the operation has been calculated at approximately \$400,000-\$500,000.¹⁴⁵ Although minute in comparison to the incredible economic damage inflicted on America and the Western financial systems, the outlay was significant for al-Qaeda whose previous missions had cost far less. The scarcity of funds is indicated by the fact that an excess \$26,000 was wired to an al-Qaeda operative in UAE a few days before 9/11.¹⁴⁶

Back in Afghanistan final preparations were also taking place. Unbeknownst to their hosts Zawahiri had been devising a separate plot to assassinate the leader of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban's last obstacle to control over the entire country, Ahmed Shah Massoud. On September 9th, 2001 two al-Qaeda operatives in the guise of journalists interviewing the leader, exploded a camera killing the two assassins and their target.

There are several possible motivations that could to be attributed to the mission and the proximity in the timing is certainly important. Massoud had become America's unofficial partner in Afghanistan and had been contacted by the CIA to devise a plot to capture or kill bin Laden. The Northern Alliance, as the Taliban's only significant obstacle to sole sovereignty, was naturally also a target for al-Qaeda who depended on Mullah Omar's good will for their continued protection in Afghanistan that came at a considerable political and

¹⁴⁴ The 9/11 Commission Report p.249

¹⁴⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report p.169

¹⁴⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report p.252

economic cost to the Taliban. In previous years al-Qaeda had lent fighters to the Taliban in their offensives against the Northern Alliance and therefore had good reason for targeting their leader. However the contemporaneous assassination with 9/11 would indicate a more specific reason for mission. It has been widely suggested that al-Qaeda wished to weaken the Northern Alliance in anticipation of the American retribution for 9/11 that saw the Alliance, in conjunction with US Special Forces sweep through the country deposing the Taliban from power and displacing al-Qaeda. This however seems to use retrospective reasoning that presupposes that al-Qaeda was able to foresee the American response. It is more likely that Massoud was targeted as a kind of pre-emptive compensation to the Taliban for the negative effects that they would certainly suffer in response to 9/11. In the months leading up to 9/11, the Taliban's leadership council were divided over the hosting of al-Qaeda for similar reasons that had upset the Saudis and Sudanese previously. An independent body autonomously conducting belligerent foreign policy against far stronger foes would be a radical challenge to any state's sovereignty and it was only Mullah Omar's personal support for bin Laden that allowed al-Qaeda to stay.

With its execution the global audience of 9/11 watched in real time the unfolding drama that for several hours held the rapt attention of hundreds of millions. This was exactly what bin Laden had in mind when he wanted to unveil the real but hidden conflict of Islam and the West. The stunning visual image of the towers being struck, then smoking against a pristine blue New York skyline before their final dramatic collapse will remain a defining image for the 21st century. A week after the attack Karlheinz Stockhausen—a German composer—provocatively claimed that 9/11 constituted 'the greatest work of art ever.'¹⁴⁷ Although the particular confluence of events that conspired to create the unique aesthetics of 9/11 were largely outside of the control of the organizers—and thus we must resist imputing the omniscience that would have been necessary to construct the event in all its details—the broad structure of the attacks were certainly planned with its symbolic and aesthetic impact. The rhetoric prior to 9/11 that had constantly invoked the language of 'war' was made indisputably real and writ large on the New York skyline. Finally the entire world was forced to literally *see* the battle that had been taking place in the collective consciousness of the international Islamists since Qutb. In this sense 9/11 served as the grand unveiling of the

¹⁴⁷ TimesOnline "Obituary: Karlheinz Stockhausen"

underlying reality of the conflict between Islam and *jahiliyya* that the international Islamists had been attempting to bring about for years.

The seemingly endless repeated cycle of images scorched itself on the consciousness of the globalized audience as it watched—in anticipation of the next attack—in mesmerised horror. The expectation of further attacks during the day, the ‘what next’ of the unbridled imagination of the audience, was the source of the real drama of 9/11. This was the future anticipatory dissonance of terror played out in an intense single day; but would continue to haunt the imagination for years afterwards. In the short term this effected a kind of national paralysis in the United States as a heightened security alert manifested itself in numerous restrictions and checks hastily created in 9/11’s wake. Networks were closed, in particular aviation traffic and the stock exchanges, as the nation effectively seized up in shock. In the following years an indefinite and unspecific state of diffused tension marked public life, a state reflected, and partly maintained by, the Homeland Security Advisory System that publishes a colour-coded alert that has to date never fallen below the yellow ‘elevated’ level.¹⁴⁸

Shortly after 9/11, in a tape released to the al Jazeera network on October 7th, 2001 bin Laden summed up the attack in a telling comment: ‘These events have divided the whole world into two sides—the side of believers and the side of infidels. May God keep you away from them. Every Muslim has to rush to make his religion victorious. The winds of faith have come.’¹⁴⁹ Bin Laden hoped that the spectacularly stark attack would unveil, and simultaneously realise, the dualisms that had haunted al-Banna and were crafted into violent rhetoric by Qutb. The scale of the conflict that bin Laden had imagined was both transcendent in scale—a war of Islam against the West, authentic faith against materialism and modernity—and simultaneously grounded in a keen realism that sought a war of attrition to defeat the Americans using the same methods that had precipitated the collapse of the USSR.

An armed intervention against Afghanistan was anticipated but Zawahiri’s downcast response in *Knights Under The Prophet’s Banner* suggests that there was a schism between the two men concerning the utility of provoking the superpower. As we have previously explored,

¹⁴⁸ Department of Homeland Security—Homeland Security Advisory System
http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/Copy_of_press_release_0046.shtm Checked on 05/01/10.

¹⁴⁹ Osama bin Laden cited in Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda’s Road to 9/11* p.370

Zawahiri's pragmatic impulse to secure a stable base for the *ihadists* had to take priority over striking the enemy. His experience of the Egyptian Islamist movement provided him with a salutary lesson. By continuously provoking the government with violent attacks and thus facing successive waves of repression the movement eventually had to capitulate. Zawahiri was certain—as were many other commentators—that the Taliban and al-Qaeda would be swiftly destroyed by the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. Typical of these prematurely written obituaries was Kepel's claim: 'within a hundred days the U.S. army had wiped the Taliban regime from the face of the earth, and bin Laden was on the run, his secret cells dismantled or disbanded.'¹⁵⁰

This paradox at the heart of 9/11 was also manifested in the suicidal death of the perpetrators of the attack. Although this was necessary for its successful completion and therefore can be explained in terms of pragmatic utility, the suicide of the attackers was also indicative of the concept of shame that was a novel feature of bin Laden's ideology. 'It becomes clear to us,' bin Laden claimed in a video found on a computer of a member of the Hamburg cell, 'that shying away from the fight, combined with the love of earthly existence that fills the hearts of many of us, is the source of this misery, this humiliation, and this contempt.'¹⁵¹ The idea of an intolerably shameful existence meant that the wish for martyrdom and self-annihilation were also present in the act of 9/11 and other suicide attacks. Taking part in *ihad*, for at least some of the hijackers, was a means of escaping their shameful existence with the sublime dignity of the martyr. Mark Juergensmeyer claimed: 'I can imagine a line with "strategic" on the one side and "symbolic" on the other, with various acts of terrorism located in between.'¹⁵² However it is our contention that acts of Islamist terrorism can simultaneously occupy both ends of this spectrum in the same instance. Once again the transcendent, otherworldly and self-destructive spirit of *ihad* was welded together through the Islamist ideology with the calculated rationality of the al-Qaeda planners.

4.6 Conclusions

Throughout this study we have argued that Islamist movements and terrorism—so spectacularly exhibited in 9/11—can be usefully understood by examining the evolution of

¹⁵⁰ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* pp.375-376

¹⁵¹ Osama bin Laden cited in Lawrence Wright *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* p.349

¹⁵² Mark Juergensmeyer *Terror In The Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* pp.125-126

the Islamist ideology. We identified and rejected the reasons why ideology has frequently been ignored or downplayed in both the academic and lay discourse on terrorism. This led us to propose a methodology that took the Islamist ideology seriously in order to understand the meaning of acts of terrorism. We saw how terrorism was frequently studied as an abstract mode of action. This, we argued, was a mistake as devoid of its historical, intellectual and social context the meaning of terrorism was lost. These theorists studied how terrorism worked but did not seriously question what it meant or why it happened. From both the neoconservative and left wing perspectives the ideology of the Islamists was either dismissed as fanaticism or substituted for with the theorist's political perspective. Psychological and socio-economic accounts also fell flat because of their exclusive focus on the dispositions or backgrounds of the actors or the inner workings of the groups. Rational-choice models also failed to account for why certain 'preferences' or ideas were held by the actors and movements. All of these accounts failed, in their own way, to take seriously the Islamist ideology as a way of understanding terrorism.

Historical and journalistic-style accounts of the Islamist movement often do pay some attention to the ideology but even in these works there is a strong tendency to relegate the ideology to the sidelines; explaining it away as a rationalisation for more powerful forces. In this way the ideology is dismissed as 'extremism,' 'fundamentalism,' or 'radicalism' rather than being taken seriously as a coherent, comprehensible and comprehensive ideology. Some accounts that do take notice of the ideology over-emphasize one aspect such as Juergensmeyer on the Islamists use of symbolism and transcendent violence. Shortly after 9/11 one of the foremost theorists of the Islamist movement, Giles Kepel wrote: 'In spite of what many hasty commentators contended in its immediate aftermath, the attack on the United States was a desperate symbol of the isolation, fragmentation, and decline of the Islamist movement, not a sign of its strength and irrepressible might.'¹⁵³ As we argued in the first chapter Kepel makes the mistake of underestimating the strength, depth, resilience and importance of the Islamist ideology in the continuing practice of the Islamist movement. By failing to take the ideology seriously these analysts ultimately fail to understand the Islamist movement, or account for its dynamism and longevity.

¹⁵³ Gilles Kepel *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* pp.375-376

Our claim was not that the Islamist ideology caused terrorism, but that understanding the ideology was crucial for understanding the meaning of terrorism. Our starting claim was that understanding the Islamist ideology was essential for understanding the Islamist movement. We also claimed that the relationship between the ideology and movement was interactive and dynamic. Furthermore, we argued that neither the movement nor the ideology could be usefully examined on their own but would need to be understood simultaneously. This could be done by using an ideology-narrative methodology that studied the development of the movement and the ideology at the same time and drew out the links between them. In the second, third and fourth chapters we critically examined the history of the modern Islamist ideology and charted its evolutionary stages as it progressed through different historical, social and political situations. We saw how the interaction between the Islamist movement and the ideology—theory and practice—can be used to understand how the ideology evolved in the direction that it did.

The success of the ideology-narrative methodology can be seen in several ways. It allows us to account for the longevity of the ideology and its ability to allow the movement to evolve to new political and pragmatic situations. It also helps explain how the movement can simultaneously pursue seemingly contradictory paths—that of symbolic violence and pragmatic strategies. We saw how theological concepts were appropriated by the movement's intellectual leaders and used to comprehensively understand the contemporary world and their place within it. We also demonstrated the importance of a singular conceptual framework that could be used to cogently link various problems together into a single nexus that required the single solution of Islam. An interesting aspect of the ideology was the way in which the Islamists interpreted the world—the descriptive element of the ideology—remained relatively stable during the period that we studied, and was always comprehensive and expansive. By contrast the prescriptive element of the ideology evolved rapidly from one period to the other and was also lacking in relative detail. This could explain (and be explained by) the drastic shifts in the tactics and actions of the Islamists but the relative stability of their worldview.

Two features of the ideology can help explain its longevity. The first is the irreducible and permanent core that has remained a critical feature of the ideology since al-Banna: the conviction on the unity and perfection of Islam as a complete and comprehensive system for

governing all of life. This core gives it the ideology a recognisable form irrespective of its particular manifestation and partly accounts for its durability. By contrast the second feature of the ideology is its ability to adapt to new circumstances and situations, and evolve to meet new challenges. This evolutionary flexibility is both a cause of, and reflected, in the way in which Islamist movements have been able to adapt their organizational structures and operations to rapidly changing realities. As we have argued the ideology exists and evolves in an ever-changing two-way relationship with the movements that have adopted and adapted it. Just as the various Islamist movements and their behaviour have been defined and shaped by the ideology; so too has the ideology been moulded and reformulated by movements, and in particular their ideological and intellectual leaders. The fluidity of the ideology lies in the fact that the core premise allows for a remarkable range of interpretations of what this entails. The core belief forms the basic structure of the ideology whilst the content that follows varies according to the particular version of the ideology.

These features of the ideology help us to understand the progress of the Islamist movement after 9/11. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the post-9/11 period so we shall restrict ourselves to a few general observations. Following the attacks and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq the Islamist ideology and movement have demonstrated their extraordinary ability to evolve and this has been manifested in several ways. In some instances the ideology has radically decentralized once again becoming largely detached from the main organizational structure of al-Qaeda resulting in the phenomena of self-starter terrorism.¹⁵⁴ This was exemplified in the 2004 Madrid and 2007 London bombings, when the perpetrators autonomously formed cells that planned, organized, funded and executed the attacks without significant help from al-Qaeda. In these instances the ideology (and technical information available through the Internet) was sufficient for successful terrorist attacks in the absence of a supporting organization. The rise of self-starter terrorism did not mean the end of the larger movements which since 9/11 have continued to adapt to new situations and have formed and reformed in areas of the world where the geopolitical situation has allowed such as north Africa and Pakistan.

In a variety of guises and arenas around the world the Islamist ideology and movement has continued to evolve and adapt to new conditions. Only by recognising the importance,

¹⁵⁴ See Aidan Kirby "The London Bombers as "Self-Starters": A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques"

coherence and resilience of the ideology can Islamist terrorism be fully understood. In this work we have studied one crucial historical narrative of the ideology; however there are other methodologies that could be applied to gain further insights into the Islamist movement and ideology. Further research would be necessary for understanding different histories of the Islamist movement and alternative perspectives on one of the most significant political, social and philosophical issues of the 20th and 21st century.

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